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**DAMAGED BODIES: WOMEN'S AGENCY IN *TRECENTO*
FLORENTINE SOTERIOLOGICAL DISCOURSES**

VOLUME 1

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in 2014
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Declaration for PhD thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the formation of identity in religious discourse as necessarily gendered and embodied. I will establish that while theories of corporeality, bodies and embodiment have explored diverse processes of bodily identity formation, the production of bodies within religious discourses has not been adequately addressed. I develop a critical feminist analysis that demonstrates how and why religious discourses are formative of embodied, gendered identities. Specifically, I argue that historically Christian soteriology has been productive of embodied, gendered identities in multiple ways: (1) soteriological discourses produce normative ideals of embodiment; (2) these normative ideals result in the materialisation of human desires for their own bodies to approximate those ideals; (3) the disparity between normative ideals of religious embodiment and actual bodies produces material effects that are damaging for those bodies which are farthest from the religious, and thus normative ideal. I assert that this final layer of production becomes apparent through reading religious discourses as performative; that is, bodily identities do not materialise in a 'singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (J. Butler 1993: 2). I test my hypothesis via a historical case study of those fourteenth-century Florentine soteriological discourses and doctrines which necessitated the materialisation of female bodies as 'damaged' alongside the articulation of women's desires for their bodies to approximate the normative ideal (specifically the resurrected male body of Christ). My reading of these discourses indicates how the normative ideal, because of its necessary iteration, was elastic, enabling gendered, embodied subjects to negotiate their discursive positions and I argue that this negotiation enables identification of female agency in the historical record. However, I depart from some feminist scholarship by disputing that this agency must necessarily be read in terms either of collusion or subversion. Instead, I argue that in contexts where Christian soteriological discourses produce not only normative ideals, but also desires within embodied subjects to approximate those normative ideals, it is contradictory to suggest that agential action must be only either subversive of or collusive with discourse. Female agency in *trecento* Florence was far more complex.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT | 3 |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | 7 |
| CONVENTIONS AND ORTHOGRAPHY | 9 |
| PRETEXT | 11 |
| INTRODUCTION | 15 |
| I. <i>Overview</i> | 15 |
| II. <i>Methodological Approaches</i> | 23 |
| III. <i>Research Context</i> | 25 |
| IV. <i>Framing Damaged Bodies: A Review of Literature</i> | 26 |
| V. <i>Structure of the Thesis</i> | 42 |
| VI. <i>Three Case Studies of Women's Commissions</i> | 47 |
| CHAPTER ONE | 50 |
| I. <i>Speech Act Theory & the Study of Religions</i> | 51 |
| (i) Judith Butler's Theories of Performativity | 54 |
| II. <i>Critically Questioning the Feminist Subject</i> | 58 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 71 |
| I. <i>A Historical Overview</i> | 72 |
| (i) Landscape | 75 |
| (ii) Political and Economic Turmoil in the Late Fourteenth Century | 78 |
| (iii) Florentine Society: Family, Education and the Arts | 82 |
| II. <i>Religious Life</i> | 88 |
| CHAPTER THREE..... | 97 |
| I. <i>Three Doctrinal Currents</i> | 97 |
| (i) Soteriology and imitatio Christi | 97 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| (ii) Eschatology and Purgatory | 102 |
| (iii) Materiality and Paradox | 105 |
| II. <i>The Relevance of Faith, Hope and Charity</i> | 110 |
| CHAPTER FOUR..... | 117 |
| I. <i>Some Textual Sources for Faith, Hope and Charity</i> | 118 |
| (i) Peter Lombard's Sentences..... | 120 |
| (ii) Thomas Aquinas | 125 |
| (iii) Bonaventure & Meditationes vitae Christi..... | 131 |
| II. <i>Gender and Charity in Text and Practice</i> | 139 |
| (i) Theological Definitions of Man and Woman..... | 140 |
| (ii) Gender and Virtues..... | 150 |
| (iii) Women's Virtues & Charitable Practices in Florence | 154 |
| CHAPTER FIVE..... | 161 |
| I. <i>The Importance of Art in Trecento Florence</i> | 165 |
| II. <i>A Brief Overview of Trecento Florentine Religious Art</i> | 171 |
| (i) The Performance of Trecento Religious Art | 172 |
| (ii) The Human Suffering of Christ..... | 174 |
| (iii) The Visibility of Women | 175 |
| (iv) Boundaries of Orthodoxy | 182 |
| CHAPTER SIX..... | 185 |
| I. <i>The Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility as a Model</i> | 189 |
| (i) A Constructive Critique..... | 193 |
| (ii) An Alternative Reading..... | 201 |
| II. <i>The Pietà from San Remigio</i> | 207 |
| (i) An Alternative Reading..... | 216 |
| III. <i>The Santa Croce Refectory Frescoes</i> | 224 |
| (i) An Alternative Reading..... | 229 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| IV. <i>Conclusion</i> | 237 |
| CONCLUSION | 241 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 248 |

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CONVENTIONS AND ORTHOGRAPHY

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| <i>Brevil.</i> | <i>Breviloquium</i> (Bonaventure) |
| d. | died |
| <i>De natura</i> | <i>De natura et gratia</i> (Augustine) |
| <i>De Veritate</i> | <i>Questiones Disputatae de Veritate</i> (Thomas Aquinas) |
| <i>Del reggimento</i> | <i>Del reggimento e costume di donna</i> (Francesco Barberino) |
| <i>Doctrina</i> | <i>De doctrina christiana</i> (Augustine) |
| <i>Ench.</i> | <i>Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide, spe, et caritas</i> (Augustine) |
| <i>In Sent. I- IV</i> | <i>Commentarius in I, II, III, IV librum Sententiarum</i> (Bonaventure) |
| <i>In Ioannem</i> | <i>Tractatus in Ioannem</i> (Augustine) |
| <i>LV</i> | <i>Lignum vitae</i> (Bonaventure) |
| <i>MVC</i> | <i>Meditationes vitae Christi</i> (Pseudo-Bonaventure) |
| <i>Perfection</i> | <i>De perfection iustitiae hominis</i> (Augustine) |
| <i>Sentences</i> | <i>Libri Quattuor Sententiarum</i> (Peter Lombard) |
| <i>ST</i> | <i>Summa Theologiae</i> (Thomas Aquinas) |
| <i>Trin.</i> | <i>De Trinitate</i> (Augustine) |

List of Figures

All of the figures listed below are presented in Volume 2 of the thesis.

| | | |
|------------|--|--------|
| Figure 1: | Giotto, <i>Maestà (The Ognissanti Madonna)</i> , c. 1310 | p. 262 |
| Figure 2: | Apollonio di Giovanni, <i>Triumph of Chastity</i> , c. 1470 | p. 263 |
| Figure 3: | Giottino, <i>Pietà</i> , c. 1360-1365 | p. 264 |
| Figure 4: | Nardo di Cione, <i>Crucifixion</i> , c. 1350 | p. 265 |
| Figure 5: | 'Florentine Painter', <i>Crucifix with Stories of the Passion and the Redemption</i> , c. last quarter, 12 th century | p. 266 |
| Figure 6: | Masolino, <i>Temptation of Adam and Eve</i> , c. 1425 | p. 267 |
| Figure 7: | Jacopo di Cione, <i>Coronation of the Virgin</i> , c. 1370-71 | p. 268 |
| Figure 7a: | Jacopo di Cione, <i>Coronation of the Virgin</i> (detail) | p. 269 |
| Figure 8: | Giusto de' Menabuoi, <i>The Coronation of the Virgin, Scenes from the Lives of Joachim and Anna, and from the Life of the Virgin</i> , c. 1367 | p. 270 |
| Figure 9: | Pietro Lorenzetti, <i>Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility</i> , c. 1340 | p. 271 |
| Figure 10: | 'A Recreation of the Humility Polyptych attributed to Pietro Lorenzetti' | p. 272 |
| Figure 11: | Maestro di Gualdo Tadino, <i>Santa Chiara Dossal</i> , c. 1283 | p. 273 |
| Figure 12: | Pietro Lorenzetti, <i>Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility</i> (central panel) | p. 274 |
| Figure 13: | Giottino, <i>Pietà</i> , close-up of donors, c. 1360-1365 | p. 275 |

| | | |
|------------|---|--------|
| Figure 14: | Guariento, <i>Crucifixion with the donatrix Bona Maria Bovolini</i> , c. 1360 | p. 276 |
| Figure 15: | Taddeo Gaddi, <i>The Tree of Life</i> (detail with donor), c. 1335-1340 | p. 277 |
| Figure 16: | Giotto, <i>Legend of St Francis: 13. Institution of the Crib at Greccio</i> , c. 1297-1300 | p. 278 |
| Figure 17: | Taddeo Gaddi, Overview of the Santa Croce Refectory, c. 1330-1360 | p. 279 |
| Figure 18: | Taddeo Gaddi, <i>The Last Supper, 'Lignum Vitae', and Other Scenes</i> , c. 1330-1360 | p. 280 |
| Figure 19: | Taddeo Gaddi, 'Detail of Mourners and kneeling Donor' from <i>'Lignum Vitae'</i> , c. 1330-1360 | p. 281 |
| Figure 20: | Taddeo Gaddi, detail of Louis with the 'poor and sick', c. 1330-1360 | p. 282 |

Notes on Style & Format

1. Emphases are indicated in italic type. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphases in quotations are in the original. Further, the variant spellings in sources cited are unaltered.
2. References from classical sources, i.e. Greek and Latin, are listed in the Bibliography under the author but throughout the thesis, I have listed these sources according to the standard form of citation, i.e. *Title Chapter/Book, verse*.

PRETEXT

In March 2013, I presented a paper at a conference entitled ‘Talking Bodies: An International, Interdisciplinary Conference on Identity, Sexuality and Representation’. The experience of attending and presenting at this conference was unique in many ways but most importantly, it was the first time I witnessed true interdisciplinarity. In addition to scholars from many fields of study, also in attendance were artists, medical practitioners, litigators, writers and performers. Bodies were analysed and discussed from multiple methodological perspectives: The (textual) Body, the medicalised body, literary bodies, sexual bodies, performing bodies, disembodied ‘bodies’. It was a great surprise therefore, to find that amongst the other presenters, there were only one or two who were also analysing the ways in which embodiments were affected by religious discourses.¹ My paper was one of only a handful which engaged with discourses of religion as a crucial element of embodied ‘identity, sexuality and representation’. It was difficult to understand this void in light of all of the rich, diverse presentations that comprised the rest of the conference. Moreover, the contexts within which many of the papers presented were situated—the early modern West, for instance—seemed insufficiently framed without some attention to their relevant religious traditions. It is not to suggest that all analyses of bodies, embodiment or corporeality must focus primarily on ‘religion’, but rather, that within western academia (where many fields of intellectual inquiry are in fact informed by religious discourses), religious traditions cannot be entirely disregarded when investigating formations of corporeal identity.

The ways in which religious discourses affect embodiment within western contexts seem to me to have become even more relevant in the years since I began this thesis. In 2012, the US Presidential Election gave way to a maelstrom of conservative-Christian rhetoric concerned primarily with women’s sexuality, women’s bodies, and what could only be controversially labelled as women’s rights. Normative definitions of a ‘good, Christian woman’ informed conservative political stances on sexual education, women’s healthcare programs, and abortion such that

¹ For the full conference program see Rees 2012.

policy changes were proposed that would mandate abstinence-only education programs; women's healthcare clinics would be denied funding for operation; and women's rights to abortion would be outlawed. Women's bodies became one of the primary battle grounds upon which the struggle for control of America's political future was fought. Christian discourses were the 'weapon' of choice for many conservative political leaders. The intermingling of 'church and state' in the determination of women's rights did not begin with the 2012 election however, and my own involvement, beginning in 2008, in the cultural debates surrounding women's bodies in many ways brought me to my current research project. I spent over a year working for a women's healthcare agency in Denver, Colorado, among other services, my agency provided young women with access to birth control, to STD testing, to HPV vaccines, and to abortion services. All of these services were protested against, to varying degrees and in multiple ways, by Christian groups who sought to define legally the ways in which women's bodies could behave and be cared for. In every instance that I experienced antagonism from protestors, the justifications were always firmly rooted in Christian discourses centred on ideals of virginity, marriage, family, and most of all, 'Woman'.

When I began the process of constructing a proposal for my PhD, there was little doubt in my mind that the ways in which religious discourses affected women's bodies formed a site of investigation that, although not new, was still one of crucial importance within western contexts. However, after having spent considerable amounts of emotional energy and time on a women's healthcare clinic, I felt it was impossible for me to analyse effectively the (largely) Protestant discourses which inform the political debates surrounding women's embodiment in the US. As an American woman myself, and as one who chose to work in the very environment which was so often under attack by certain conservative political groups, I doubted whether I could shed my own feminist assumptions about specific Protestant ideals of women's bodies such that I would be able to let the data 'speak' to me. This act of self-reflexivity was not undertaken simply to avoid personal discomfort (although, that was certainly a factor), rather, I began to investigate other sites of inquiry wherein my own context would not preclude the necessary possibility for the text to

be the primary determinant of careful, critical research questions.² As I shall explain below, my selection of fourteenth-century Florence as the context within which to conduct a case study is not because I believe historical modes of embodiment may be mapped unproblematically onto ‘postmodern’ bodies, nor that an analysis of *trecento* religious discourses will provide an explanation for the woes women suffer as living citizens today within the West. Rather, in my desire to unpick further the complex ways in which religious discourses affect women’s bodies, I began to search for a context that was not entirely divorced from my own, but that was distant enough such that I might be able to formulate theoretically critical questions as a result of local, contingent evidence.³ Where my own experiences of American Christian discourses centred on women’s embodied identities had often left me feeling disenfranchised, I hoped that a historical case study would enable me to find the ways in which other women had subverted or disrupted religious discourses in their own contexts. Thus, even after establishing the need to focus on a case study that was removed from my immediate personal circumstances, what was at stake in beginning this type of research was still very personal.

The current state of feminism, whether in forms of social activism, or as a dynamic body of scholarly theories, is no less contested and tumultuous than it was during the 1960s and 1970s. Although feminists of varying types have embraced self-reflexivity and intersectionality as being necessary elements in both social and academic analyses, many western feminists still struggle to escape their own agendas to such an extent that the ‘other’ may come to matter.⁴ My research began

² My ability to articulate this last point was made possible because of my introduction to Saba Mahmood’s work (2005) which has been (perhaps surprisingly) instrumental to the construction of this thesis.

³ I think it bears mentioning that as a feminist scholar located within the discipline of the study of religions, I do not believe it is possible to ‘entirely divorce’ oneself from one’s object of study. I acknowledge that I must speak from my own standpoint. However, I have endeavoured to speak ‘authentically and non-imperialistically’, in order to allow *trecento* Christian women’s voices to ‘sound’ the loudest (Gross 1996: 51).

⁴ The current-day feminist movement FEMEN is one such social organisation which illustrates this point well; despite their desires to ‘develop leadership, intellectual and moral qualities of young women’, FEMEN’s topless protests and corporeal graffiti often reveal imperialist, racist tendencies that alienate and marginalise the very same women for whom they claim to be fighting. As shall become apparent throughout my thesis, the ways in which some academic feminists—who still (somewhat unwittingly perhaps) rely on temporally and culturally specific paradigms of women’s agency—further marginalise women situated in contexts foreign to their own similarly call for constructive critique and revision.

with my desire to record and critique the ways in which religious discourses impacted women's embodiment but as I progressed, I realised that equally important were the ways in which I, as a feminist scholar, must also challenge and expand my own categories of identity. Therefore, the importance of my choice to analyse a historical case study, rather than one directly related to my present-day context, cannot be understated. The distance of this thesis (however tenuously measured) from the personal experiences which inspired me to pursue this research enabled me to recognise the ways in which my own taken-for-granted definitions of women's embodied identities and of women's agency were not universal nor atemporal. Investigating women's corporeality in early modern Florence seemed to me to be the perfect opportunity for locating powerfully subversive ritual expressions and yet the more I researched, the more I realised that my desires were obscuring the specific, unique ways Florentine women were *actually* navigating Christian discourses. This thesis is a theoretical investigation of religious discourses, but by employing a historical case study within which to ground my analyses, I learned the necessity of rigorous scholarship that is not devoid of one's personal politics, but which is also not entirely dominated by them. Thus, this research has, on the one hand, allowed me to contribute to a field of inquiry that I still believe to be of some urgency, and on the other hand, it has helped me to assess critically my own methodology. I did not find precisely what I was searching for in fourteenth-century Florence, but the lessons I did learn—ones that I believe to be of direct relevance for other feminist scholars of religions—are of a much greater and lasting value.

INTRODUCTION

I. Overview

This thesis examines the formation of identity in religious discourse as necessarily gendered and embodied. I will establish that while current scholarship concerned with theories of corporeality, bodies and embodiment has explored diverse processes of bodily identity formation, the production of bodies within religious discourses has not been addressed adequately. I will develop a critical feminist analysis that demonstrates how and why religious discourses are formative of embodied, gendered identities. More specifically, I will argue that historically, Christian soteriology has been productive of embodied, gendered identities in multiple ways: first, soteriological discourses produce normative ideals of embodiment. Second, these normative ideals result in the materialisation of human desires for their own bodies to approximate those ideals. Finally, the disparity between normative ideals of religious embodiment and actual bodies produces material effects that become increasingly damaging for those gendered bodies which are situated farthest from the religious, and thus normative ideal. I assert that this final layer of production becomes apparent through reading religious discourses as performative; that is, following Judith Butler's theorisation of materiality, bodily identities do not materialise in a 'singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (1993: 2). Nevertheless, I do not present discourse as static and impermeable. Rather, my reading of performative religious discourses indicates the ways in which normative ideals, because of their necessary iteration, are always already dynamic and elastic. Ultimately, this elasticity allows gendered, embodied subjects to negotiate their discursive positions, to push corporeally against discursive boundaries. The various methods of negotiation employed by religious subjects, I suggest, provide feminist scholars with possible ways to locate and define agency. I depart from some feminist scholarship, however, in disputing the idea that the ways in which gendered, embodied subjects negotiate discursive boundaries must necessarily be read in terms either of collusion or subversion, and that by extension, agency must be understood solely in terms of subversive action. Instead, I

conclude that in contexts where Christian soteriological discourses produce not only normative ideals, but also desires within embodied subjects to approximate those normative ideals, it is contradictory to suggest that agential action must be characterised only as disruptive or subversive of discourse.

I test my hypotheses via a historical case study, which occupies the majority of the thesis, and which explores how fourteenth-century Florentine soteriological doctrines necessitated the materialisation of female bodies as ‘damaged’ coupled with women’s desires for their bodies to approximate the normative ideal. The foundational Christian doctrine of salvation posits that Jesus Christ, the son of God, was sent to Earth and given human form in order to save humanity from their sinfulness. Human beings need salvation because of Original Sin committed by Adam and Eve, God’s first human creations. In the biblical narrative recorded in Genesis, Eve is tricked by Satan (Gen. 3: 1-6) (disguised as a serpent) into eating the forbidden fruit, which she then gives to Adam. Upon realising what Adam and Eve had done, God banished them from Eden and cursed all of human-kind for their sin. For *trecento* Florentines, the doctrine of salvation taught that all human beings were in need of saving, that their human condition was inherently corrupt. As a result of early and medieval Christian interpretations of Original Sin as attributable to the actions of Eve, and because of powerful associations of all women with Eve, women were perceived of as doubly sinful and corrupt. This doctrinal degradation of women was compounded by philosophical representations of the female body (as impure, weak, and ‘monstrous’), that were being read and circulated amongst ecclesiastical authorities in *trecento* Florence.¹ The subsequent social and religious discourses, therefore, named the female body as damaged and by extension, constructed women’s embodiment farther from salvation. I suggest that this combination of Christian doctrine and Greek philosophies be read as discourse² because of the ways

¹ Following Greek philosophy, women are aligned with meekness, frailty, flesh, and bodily fluids while men are conceived of as whole, impermeable, and even aphysical. For helpful feminist critiques of the legacy of binary thinking within philosophy see Lloyd 1993; Cixous 1976; Clack 1999; Gatens 1991 and Jantzen 1995.

² Michel Foucault discusses discourse as a ‘delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories’ (in Bouchard 1977: 199). Hawthorne argues that ‘Foucault’s conception of “discourse” and “discursive practices” opens a way to see the complex and productive interplay between narrative and material reality’ (2006: 23). What I find particularly helpful about Foucault’s conception of discourse is his assertion that

these formed boundaries around what could be known by Florentine men and women,³ and thus through their reiteration, they solidified what was ‘true’ about the ways men and women were embodied.⁴ Although Caroline Walker Bynum (2011) has argued that paradox lies at the heart of Christianity, I argue that for *trecento* Florentine women, doctrines of salvation meant that this paradox was always equivocal. As a result of Christ’s sacrifice, all human beings could be saved from their sinful corporeal state, but because the female body was understood to be weak, contaminated, and particularly fleshly, women’s positions as Christian subjects were always already farther removed from eternal salvation as symbolised by the resurrected body of Christ. Thus, Florentine women’s embodiment was discursively constructed as more ‘threat’ than ‘promise’.

I will suggest that soteriological discourses damaged women in a number of ways. First, owing to the threat the female body, and female sexuality was assumed to pose—given its construction as more inherently sinful—middle- and upper-class Florentine women were erased from civic life by being confined (largely) in their homes, except for rare ritual occasions and mass.⁵ Lower-class women were considered even more corrupt (and in the case of slaves, non-human) and so

knowledge is organised by dominant, ‘legitimate’ perspectives and as a result, ‘norms’ are formed. Hawthorne points towards the ways these ‘norms’ become the measuring stick against which material objects are measured; material reality, therefore, comes to be organised in terms of ‘normal’ or as a departure from ‘normal’. Finally, for a study of religion, it seems important to include the ways in which discourse may take various forms: Juschka defines discourse ‘to mean forms of communication both verbal and non-verbal. Therefore, symbolic discourses such as ritual, art, spectacle, image and icon are included’ (2001: 19).

³ Sarah Salih suggests that within the later Middle Ages, in addition to the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, the category ‘virgin’ may also be ‘conceptualised as a gendered identity which can be constituted in culturally significant action’ (2001: 1). In Chapters Two and Four of this thesis, I will return to Salih’s argument with respect to fourteenth-century Florence.

⁴ This study focuses on the ways in which the category ‘woman’ was constructed via soteriological discourses but as I have implied, the category ‘man’ also materialised as a result. As Riches and Salih argue, ‘men’s religion as men’s religion’ is a ‘fundamental issue: to leave masculinity unexplored would be to perpetuate the masculinist illusion that it is unproblematic’ (2002: 3). Despite the majority of my analysis centering on women’s embodiment, I do examine some of the ways men’s embodiment materialised in comparison although by no means exhaustively. For examples of resources which investigate experiences of men *qua* men in the early modern period, see Cullum and Lewis 2005; Banker 2002; Klaassen 2007; Cavallo 2008; and Ruggiero 2006: 295-310.

⁵ In Chapter Two, I will explore the nuanced ways in which women managed to stretch, or even to ‘escape’, their domestic abodes as evidenced by studies like Strocchia’s (2011). However, dominant discourses—manifested in civic texts like those written by Leon Battista Alberti or Bernadino de Siena’s theological texts—maintained that women should be limited to the *casa* for the ‘good’ of all.

although they were allowed to move about the city, they too were 'erased' from civic life by being denied even the subject-position, 'woman'.⁶ Thus, in one sense, damage may be understood as erasure. Second, I will argue that women were damaged insofar as their spiritual experiences and ritual behaviours were marginalised and circumscribed. For instance, despite growing numbers of women committing themselves to confraternities or to Third Orders, women's religious communities were increasingly cloistered throughout the fourteenth century in order to curtail the 'dangerous' fervour with which they pursued a religious life. Finally, I will assert that soteriological discourses damaged women in material ways that, although not always conceived of as destructive by Florentine women themselves, nevertheless resulted in greater occurrences of bodily degradation.⁷

My feminist critique of soteriological discourses in *trecento* Florence must be qualified in two important ways, however. Primarily, it is necessary to clarify my understanding of discourse as performative and therefore, dynamic and unstable. Here I follow Butler who argues that the necessary reiteration of discourses 'is a sign that materialization is never quite complete', and further that 'the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialisation, opened by this process mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law' (1993: 2). Although my analysis diverges from Butler's in terms of how 'regulatory law' may be altered, I suggest that reading discourse in this way is necessary if we are to understand the multiple ways in which women act as agents even when occupying 'non-normative' subject positions. Secondly, although I argue that fourteenth-century Florentine women were damaged by soteriological discourses, I conclude nonetheless that it is possible to identify women's agency within this historical context. As stated previously, I assert that soteriological discourses not only produced the female body as damaged, but they also simultaneously produced

⁶ I highlight this particular point to indicate that for fourteenth-century Florentines, gender was not always the principle category of identity organisation. As I discuss in Chapter Three, poverty was treated with suspicion by church as well as by the *popolo* at large. Unfortunately, the scarcity of historical sources read or produced by *trecento* Florentines who were categorised as 'lower-class' limits the depth of analysis one can conduct.

⁷ Like Florentine Christian men, women were no less desirous of salvation and thus, for many women, the desire to 'overcome' or 'escape' their 'sinful' flesh coincided with their need to save their souls, resulting in extreme fasting, rejection of medical care and flagellation.

women's desires for their bodies to approximate the normative ideal. Thus, fourteenth-century Christian doctrines not only materialised damaging embodiments for women, they also produced women's desires for eternal salvation as symbolised by the resurrected, male body of Christ. I will argue, therefore, that the varied ways in which women attempted to approximate this ideal—and thus to occupy a Christian subject-position more capable of salvation—can be read as agential action. In making such a claim, this thesis departs from some feminist scholarship⁸ that characterises women's religious activity either in terms of 'resisting' or 'subverting' discourse. Instead, my analysis of *trecento* women suggests that the ways in which they attempted to occupy 'normative' subject positions within discourse (still defined in terms of men's embodiment) can and should be read as agential. They cannot be read as fully colluding with soteriological discourses however, because in accessing normative positions, women were stretching definitions of orthodoxy.

In order to survey accurately the ways in which *trecento* soteriological doctrines engendered damaging embodiments for women, and the ways women negotiated those discursive subject positions in accordance with their desires for salvation, this thesis focuses specifically on Florentine discourses of charity. Florentines conceptualised the possibilities of attaining salvation in myriad ways but because of Florence's tumultuous economic state and common occurrences of the plague, coupled with the prominence of the mendicant orders throughout the end of the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century, the spiritual model of *imitatio Christi* became widely practiced and informed many theological treatises. For *trecento* Florentines, the most compelling Christian example of *imitatio Christi* was Francis of Assisi. His teachings and the story of his life were known throughout Florence owing in large part to the active presence of the Franciscans and their associate confraternities. Francis' primary means of imitating Christ was to live in poverty and he linked poverty closely to the practice of charity. Charity, or *caritas*, became one of the most important theological virtues for *trecento* Florentines and the resultant discourses which circulated both within civic, as well as religious institutions,⁹

⁸ See for example Bynum 1987: 219-220; Jantzen 1998: 1-18.

⁹ As I explain in Chapter Two, the distinction between 'civic life' and 'religious life' in fourteenth-century Florence is one I have made to designate institutions, like the city's

defined charity not only as the primary theological virtue, but also as the primary means for salvation. For *trecento* Florentine women, the prevalence of charity within the spiritual landscape was important. Denied access to ecclesiastical institutions, to education past an elementary level, and even to many public spaces within the city walls, Florentine women had decidedly fewer ways to express their faith. Practices of charity, however, allowed them to venerate God in ways that coincided with their 'normative' roles. Women were the primary preparers of food and therefore had food at their disposal to distribute to those in need. Women were the primary carers for the sick, children, and the dying and these actions were again framed in terms of charitable practices owing to their appearance in both Francis' and Christ's life narratives. Theologically, women were also characterised as being 'naturally' inclined towards charitable rituals owing to their emotional affect; women imitating Christ through charitable giving, or through caring for the sick seemed appropriate to theologians like Bonaventure because women were ruled by emotion rather than logic. Finally, women were advantageously positioned to imitate Christ's humanity insofar as women were so closely associated with body and with flesh.¹⁰

Despite these associations though, women's abilities to practice or receive charity were also framed negatively by normative definitions of gender. As a result of women's perceived 'weakness', their attempts to abstain from food were often discouraged, or forcefully stopped, by male ecclesiastical authorities. Women's assumed lack of logic and hyper-emotional dispositions were the reasons authoritative men argued that women's food distributions should be monitored so they would not give in excess and threaten the livelihood of the *casa*. Mendicant women in Florence were prohibited from wandering and begging for alms as men

councils, that were not run nor monitored by ecclesiastical authorities. In fact, mendicants and ecclesiastical priests were excluded from participating in civic life because to be a 'citizen' of Florence, men had to have the ability to carry a weapon and if needs be, to fight; these things were forbidden by clerical vows. I am not suggesting, however, that these two arenas of Florentine life did not inform one another, or that civic leaders took up their responsibilities in ways which might be characterised by modern scholars as 'secular'.

¹⁰ Bynum notes that '*imitatio Christi* mingled the genders in its most profound metaphors and its most profound experiences. Women could fuse with Christ's body because they *were* in some sense body, yet women never forgot the maleness of Christ' (1989: 187-188). Whilst this 'mingling' is important to note within fourteenth-century thinking, as Bynum herself admits, fusing or interchanging genders was done 'symbolically to talk about the self and God' (*ibid.*, 187). I am interested not only in how these metaphors or symbolic gestures were informative of Christian discourses, but also how these discourses formed Florentine's *lived experiences*.

were permitted to because of the ways in which female sexuality threatened to corrupt and infect the morality of Florentine men. Florentine tertiaries were therefore cloistered and put under the supervision of a male ecclesiastical authority. Behavioural guides for women were abundant in fourteenth-century Florence and amongst other virtues, charity was centrally important to the male authors who filled countless pages of instruction for the ways in which women ought to look, behave, worship, and live. *Trecento* associations of maleness with soul, and therefore with spiritual authority, meant that women's participation in charitable practices were always mediated by a male intercessor.

Tracing women's agency under these circumstances is a tentative and fraught process. Although the fourteenth century provided some of the first accessible *ricordanze*—household diaries kept by the male head of a household—these documents were more akin to ledgers than to confessional texts and furthermore, they were the sole domain of Florentine men. Women's writing in *trecento* Florence is almost non-existent and as a result, I make a methodological argument that other sources must be analysed in order to locate women's 'voices'. I turn to women's charitable commissions of ritual art specifically. Whilst it is the case that some art reinforced normative definitions of women's embodiment, women's own commissions often display traits which exceed those definitions. For most Florentine women, the ability to commission a piece of ritual art—a diptych, a fresco, an altarpiece—was only attainable as part of their funerary bequests. Women would endow funds to their favourite confraternity, or to a convent with specific instructions about what type of ritual art they expected to be produced and moreover, the ways in which they wanted that art to be venerated upon their deaths. Scholars such as Catherine King and Cordelia Warr have argued that these commissions can be read as women's attempts to subvert the dominant discourses which excluded them both socially and spiritually from participation in early modern life. In contrast, I argue that such an interpretation, informed by problematic feminist assumptions about women's actions as only either collusive or subversive, is anachronistic to *trecento* Florentine women's experiences. While the three works of ritual art I examine do present women in ways which depart from discursive constructions of 'woman', I suggest nevertheless that they do not disrupt or subvert discourse because they leave the category of 'man as normative subject'

intact. Conversely, however, the three case studies I analyse cannot be characterised as entirely complicit with soteriological discourses either, because in their instructions for production and veneration, Florentine women made their bodies visible, they placed themselves in positions of honour, and they directly affected the possibilities for their own salvation. As such, I argue that women were not attempting to subvert discursive constructions of normative subject positions, but rather to occupy them. Thus, these three ritual art commissions may be read as agential. Nonetheless, I draw this conclusion with one final qualification: although women were able to negotiate discourses of charity in ways which resulted in their modes of embodiment being conceived of more as 'promise' than 'threat', it was most often on their deathbeds that they had these opportunities. I suggest that highlighting the paradox of women's materiality, as Bynum does, rather than taking seriously the various ways in which the unevenness of that paradox consistently damaged women's embodiment, overshadows the astonishing ways women acted as agents even in spite of their marginalisation and erasure.¹¹

Within each chapter of this thesis, I present some original arguments or compile my data in original ways. I consider my primary academic contribution, however, to be as follows: first, I demonstrate the ways in which *trecento* Florentine identities were gendered and embodied. Second, I assert that this performative process of discursive construction produced the female body as particularly damaged, whilst simultaneously producing women's desires for their bodies to approximate a normative ideal. I trace these damaging effects in terms of Florentine women's social and religious marginalisation, erasure and in some instances, bodily degradation. Third, I argue that in spite of these damaging effects, it is still possible to identify women's agency in fourteenth-century Florence. Women's commissions for ritual art, like diptychs and altarpieces, demonstrate traits which exceed definitions of normative gender. Although these pieces of ritual art have led some feminist scholars to conclude that *trecento* women were expressing their agency by

¹¹ Despite my critique of some feminist analyses of women's agency, I firmly situate my thesis within the theoretical frameworks of feminisms, nonetheless. My primary critique of Bynum is one that I believe to be feminist in essence, as Juschka asserts, '[rereading] a canonical, historical, theological or mythological text from a feminist perspective requires that one place women at the center of the discourse, in other words, to frame one's questions with women in mind' (2001: 15). In what follows, I elaborate further on the ways Bynum's analysis fails to 'place women at the center of discourse'.

acting in subversive ways that were disruptive of dominant discourses, I suggest that this is an erroneous conclusion. Thus, fourthly, by building on Saba Mahmood's critique of liberal feminist theory, I theorise the ways in which some feminist scholars of the history of religions have uncritically applied definitions of women's agency solely in terms of collusion or subversion and that as a result, their assertions about women's agency (as subversive action) in contexts like fourteenth-century Florence, cannot be sustained. Fifth, I suggest that *trecento* Florentine women's ritual art commissions cannot be characterised as subversive because they do not disrupt discourses which idealise an elite male mode of embodiment. However, because of the ways women's commissions produced women's bodies as visible and worthy of veneration, they also cannot be read as entirely collusive with discourses that constructed women as damaged. Through their desires to approximate normative subject positions, women commissioned art that in its production and veneration, stretched the boundaries of what was intelligible about salvation-worthy bodies. Finally, therefore, I argue that the ways Florentine women attempted to occupy normative subject positions, through their production of ritual art, may be read as acts of agency.

II. Methodological Approaches

Methodologically, my research seeks to address the formative effects of fourteenth-century Florentine soteriological discourses on women's embodiment informed by—perhaps at times obliquely—feminist theoretical approaches to the study of religions, disability theory, and art history. It is the points of their intersection that make these approaches valuable for my research to the extent that they support 'a movement away from definitions that describe the body as a fixed "thing" ...towards descriptions that focus on movement through time', and that foster understandings of subjectivity as 'the unique meeting place of the corporeal...and the circulating discourses...which will change from moment to moment' (Brooks 1999: 3). Despite the dizzying variety of feminisms and thus the vast array of scholarship characterised as feminist, it seems reasonable to suggest that common to all of these projects is an '[intimate connection] to the body' (Shildrick and Price 1999: 1). While

scholars involved in feminist projects react markedly differently to the various forms of exclusion and oppression precipitated by hegemonic masculinist reactions to the female body, 'feminism [necessarily] starts at least from a position of acknowledgement' (*ibid.*). This is an important distinction because as Iris Marion Young suggests, much of 'Western metaphysics has postulated the idea of an autonomous individual subject, a self-enclosed ego that inhabits but is distinct from a body' (Young 2005: 5). Additionally, any recognition (prior to feminist theorisations) of sexual difference or gender has often served to further reduce women's bodies to their reproductive capacities, universalising and then erasing, or at least deprioritising men's physicality entirely. Thus, the impetus for generating a field of scholarship centred on bodily experience as inherent to subjectivity becomes clear. However, the necessity of that scholarship to be accountable to specificity, though seemingly evident, has been largely ignored by masculinist scholarship, and provides the starting point for my feminist analysis concerning the body.

My situatedness within the field of the study of religions also informs my research in numerous ways but perhaps what bears mentioning here are the developments which have redressed past critiques of studies of religions as being disembodied. I assert that religion, like gender or ethnicity, is intimately tied up with the formation and performance of embodied identity. I am not merely suggesting that each person has a discernible or cultivated religious identity. Rather, I am arguing that even amidst cultures which purport a certain 'secularism', there is a 'lurking religiosity' (Coakley 1997: 6) in the architecture of history which has played a role in what is currently deemed as intelligible identity. Whether a woman or a man considers themselves to 'be' a religious subject does not negate the ways in which religion has historically affected the conditions of their identity formation, secular or otherwise.

My analysis also builds on disability theories to suggest that the construction of 'Woman' as corporeally inferior is not 'natural', but rather is the result of discursive iterations which through reiteration and performance come to produce that which they name. Bonnie Smith writes that '[the] cultural meanings of disability, like the cultural meanings of gender, produce human actors, who act out all the rules and themes of disability and likewise the rules of gender' (2004: 2). Thus, I have investigated the 'cultural meanings' of woman as 'damaged' within fourteenth-

century Florence and have attempted to frame the ways soteriological discourses engendered 'rules and themes' of gendered embodiment.

Finally, my research is in dialogue with early modern historiographies and histories of art. As shall be demonstrated in Chapters Two through Six of this thesis, the excellent contemporary studies centred on gender, bodies and religious experience as they materialised in the fourteenth century¹² have proven helpful for the construction of my case study. Methods of historical research are as diverse as feminist theories and so I have endeavoured to emulate those methods which seek to produce specific, theoretically critical, local historical studies.

III. *Research Context*

I have selected fourteenth-century Florence as the setting for this particular case study for several important reasons, discussed in detail in the chapters that follow but which I will summarise here. One practical consideration was the availability of resources: although many texts exist that predate the fourteenth century, both the quality and quantity of records produced in, and specifically concerned with, *trecento* Florence have provided historians with remarkably greater access to the lived experiences of Florentines. The fourteenth century also roughly marks the point at which the 'rediscovery' of the ancient philosophers—like Aristotle, Plato, Seneca, etc.—began to impact on intellectual and theological production in traceable ways. This was particularly true in Florence where the appearance of ancient philosophical texts proliferated as a result of international mercantilism. The intersection, of philosophical Latin texts with Christian theology, was particularly productive of discourses concerning bodies, corporeality and embodiment. The rise of the mendicant communities within Florence during the late thirteenth- and into the fourteenth century further contributed to an increased concern with corporeality owing to, for example, the popular model of piety embodied by Francis of Assisi, and with women's bodies in particular.¹³ Tracing women's experiences in

¹² The indisputable catalyst for such studies is, of course, Bynum 1987.

¹³ Bynum, for instance, remarks on 'the extraordinary importance given to body, especially female body, in thirteenth- to fifteenth-century religion', and furthermore, that within this

general also only becomes possible by the late twelfth century, although women's own writing does not appear in Florence until sometime in the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Florence's financial atmosphere, fostering of the arts, and the proliferation of craftsmen's workshops in the fourteenth century also make it a location of interest for this study. Women's commissions of ritual art are also traceable in Florence in new ways during the fourteenth century, as Warr explains: '[from] the late thirteenth century there is increasing evidence of women acting as the sole commissioners of devotional works' (1994: 1). Finally, the tumultuous environment of *trecento* Florence provides an especially fruitful context within which to locate women's unique negotiations of dominant discourses. Changing economic circumstances, social tensions resulting from a newly-prominent merchant class, and waves of the plague meant that the fourteenth century in Florence was an exceptionally dynamic century. Daniel Bornstein has suggested that owing to 'cracks in ecclesiastical structures', within contexts like the one I have outlined above, it becomes easier to locate 'experimentation with novel religious roles' and an 'openness to female influence' (1996: 6).

IV. Framing Damaged Bodies: A Review of Literature

This thesis aims to contribute to the diverse and still-growing field of feminist scholarship centred on theories of corporeality. The last twenty years of feminist scholarship has seen a resurgence in analysis of the body, and embodiment. As western feminism has grown more reflexive and theoretically complex, the demands for intricate, critical accounts of human subjectivity (and how it is inherently embodied) have become more prevalent. Despite the fact that human beings have always been embodied, and despite the various ways in which thinking has been steered regarding this reality, the body and how we live it remains a site of ontological urgency.¹⁵ Work ranges from anatomical, sterile accounts of the

timeframe there is 'what appear to be the historical beginnings of certain somatic events (such as stigmata or miraculous lactation)' (1989: 188).

¹⁴ Christine de Pizan is, of course, the most notable author.

¹⁵ For many feminists the re-thinking of embodied identity is considered to be an urgent task especially with respect to women who are still subject to 'the mundane

medicalised body as an object of science, to the psychoanalytic gaze regarding the body as a site of taboo and suppressed desire, to the social constructionist view that the body, like so many other elements of our subjectivity, is dictated and constructed by the social discourses in which we are embedded (Grosz 1994: 8-13). This is not to say that these approaches have been unproductive, or without merit, but rather that they have been existentially unsatisfying to the extent that they often conflate human bodily experiences or disembody human subjects altogether. In an effort to address this discomfort therefore, some fields of study have turned their attention to developing an 'analysis that lends itself to a fuller understanding of corporeality in whatever form it might take' (Shildrick and Price 1999: 9).¹⁶ Feminist theories of embodiment and corporeality have been particularly important to my research because they provide a framework for the ways in which a concept like 'damage' might be examined in both discourse and in the lived experiences of women. Feminist scholars have demonstrated that western masculinist theories of subjectivity have historically 'damaged' women's embodiment by subsuming their specificity under a 'universal' concept of subjectivity. The feminist literature that informs this thesis not only demonstrates how hegemonic discourse may be damaging, but also helps to elucidate who precisely is damaged. While men are no more homogeneous than women, feminist critique has shown that by virtue of having particular physical attributes, which have been idealised and privileged, men (particularly of a certain race, class, and nation) have escaped the intensity of

ways that actions and opportunities...are unfairly constrained by social norms', and because 'women are not as free as we ought to be' (Young 2005: 3). The body appears to be a particular site of normativitisation and regulation in this regard. Further, women's specific experiences demand exploration because historically, accounts of identity (based on men's experiences) often 'hide themselves and their specificities under the banner of some universal humanity' (Grosz 1994: xi). However, the ways in which sex, race, class, and ability intersect, and are subsequently employed as sites of varying marginalisation, are not only allocated to women. A project which asks 'which bodies come to matter?' (Butler 1993: xii) would seem to belong to all human subjects.

¹⁶ It is neither possible nor necessary to catalogue here all of the various works undertaken by feminist scholars of corporeality as several surveys already exist: see Shildrick and Price 1999; Bordo 1993; Brook 1999; Colebrook 1997; Davis 1997; Gatens 1996; Fraser and Greco 2005.

damage that women within western culture have sustained.¹⁷ Of further concern however, is the fact that analysis of the body (as inevitably gendered and performative) within religious discourse, has only recently received sustained attention.

Whether it has to do with a more general growing obsession¹⁸ or an attempt to rectify historical elisions, scholars in the study of religion have begun to clarify the long history of the body (and its primacy to religious identity) even amidst traditions where the metaphysical seemed to take precedence. Like other fields of study concerned with embodiment, the range of approaches and methodologies used by religions scholars are varied in both their application and results. As corporeality theories have grown in importance for accounts of human subjectivity, religions scholars too have increasingly engaged with discourses which point to the centrality of the body in religious identity.¹⁹ It is my argument that the complexity of the subject has not been (and cannot be) adequately investigated by any single discipline.²⁰ The literature that frames this thesis, therefore, is not only drawn from feminist theories of embodiment, but also from academic studies of religions. Moreover, as I have already noted, my concern to avoid constructing a metanarrative of 'woman's body' in generalist terms has led me to conduct a historical case study of *trecento* Florentine women's religious embodiment. A project which aims to assess the body in western Christian discourse critically must be properly contextualised; it must address the ambivalences embedded within traditional doctrine as well as the various outcomes of that ambivalence; it must

¹⁷ These statements are not meant to gloss over the disparate levels of damage suffered by men and women whose bodies are radically 'other', it is certainly the case that race, class, nation, and sexuality can intersect in devastating ways.

¹⁸ Talal Asad (in Coakley 1997: 43) suggests that 'this rapidly growing preoccupation with "the body" is itself linked to a noticeable ideological development in contemporary life: the urge to aestheticize modern life. The body as *image*—in advertisement photographs, on television, and in the flesh—whether named or unnamed, famous or ordinary, is one aspect of that tendency'. Coakley (1997: 7) similarly questions the growing preoccupation with *rethinking* the body by pondering if indeed our efforts reflect 'the last smile on the face of a *Cartesian* Cheshire Cat?' My own motivation for this project has been set out in the Pretext of this thesis.

¹⁹ See, for example, Coakley 2000; Armour and St. Ville 2006; Keller 2009; Loughlin 2007.

²⁰ Rita Gross (1996: 51) states, 'since no one can speak for all perspectives, every position, every scholar, will overlook or underemphasize something vital... The question is not whether a scholar has included every possible perspective, but whether she speaks authentically and non-imperialistically from her own standpoint'.

take into account the plurality of lived bodily experience; and it must be explorative in its excavation of those narratives that too often go unheard. This inevitably—to echo Brian Turner—suggests that any ‘analysis of the body and spirituality must therefore address the question of women’s bodies’ (in Coakley 1997: 25).

Scholarship which aims to theorise the body, but which does not include any discussion of difference is not meritless, it is simply incomplete.²¹

In light of these parameters, the studies with which my research is in dialogue are those of Caroline Walker Bynum.²² In her capstone study *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* (1987), Bynum complicates western Christian doctrine by investigating female mystical and somatic practices. Disputing assertions that early Christianity was merely made up of somatophobic doctrine, Bynum suggests that ‘medieval efforts to discipline and manipulate the body should be interpreted more as elaborate changes rung upon the *possibilities* provided by fleshliness than as flights from physicality’ (1987: 6). Through analysing medieval women’s food practices in particular, Bynum argues that although women’s models of spirituality were far more likely to involve suffering and pain,²³ she resists ‘the assumption that [medieval Christian women] simply internalized the rhetoric of theologians, confessors, or husbands’ (1987: 29-30). Ultimately, she argues that medieval holy women’s practices of fasting were attempts to define spiritual roles in spite of oppressive hegemonic discourses. For her the various food practices detailed within medieval hagiographies may be interpreted as medieval women’s resistance to masculinist Christian rhetoric which defined women as weak, fleshly and therefore, as more sinful. Instead, medieval women capitalised on their construction as fleshly in order to ‘author’ their own model of piety, one which sought to approximate and

²¹ For an example of a philosophical approach to corporeality which would otherwise offer an exceptionally challenging reading of Western embodiment, but which makes no mention of the difference in lived bodily experiences or the difference in how bodies matter, see Nancy 2008. Similarly, for a paper which successfully blurs the lines between disciplines and analyses the religious body as anatomical, culturally constructed, and cognitive, but which does so in universalist terms, see Kovach 2002. In the field of phenomenology Mensch (2009) reflects on the ways in which political discourses also contribute to the formation of bodily identity, but does not offer substantive synthesis of the role of gender, and Wynn (2009) discusses the ways in which concepts of religious experience may be extended by investigating the materiality of ‘sacred place’ but makes no mention of how this effects (and is effected by) gender.

²² Warr’s research (1994) also informs my work and I examine it in significant detail in Chapter Six below.

²³ On this point, see also Bynum 1989: 161-219.

could be associated with Christ's suffering humanity. The importance of this work for scholars of women's embodied experiences within early modern Christianity cannot be over-emphasised. Bynum's extensive research draws out the complex ways medieval women navigated dominant Christian discourses in order to re-negotiate their own bodily identities. However, important critiques have been made of Bynum's work by a number of scholars. Sarah Salih, for instance, 'takes issue' with the impression Bynum gives that 'all medieval female piety can be adequately read in these terms' (2001: 3). She writes:

Bynum suggests, for example, that pious women who showed doubt or ambivalence about extreme abstinence from food might have internalised male, clerical suspicion of such forms of asceticism. The implication is that holy women who do not practise food asceticism are somehow not proper holy women; that food extremism is a defining mark of medieval female piety. In such (rare) moments, Bynum's text slips from describing *a* model of female piety to prescribing *the* model of female piety.

(*ibid.*)

Salih suggests that this approach conflates 'medieval pious women' into a homogeneous category.²⁴ This conflation is also problematised by Amy Hollywood who suggests that the model of 'woman as body' may have been preferred by the male hagiographers but that some medieval women may not have invested meaning in that model for themselves. She states that '[while] ascetic and para-mystical experiences may be central to medieval culture's perceptions and descriptions of female sanctity...their primacy in late medieval women's *lived experiences* has not been proven' (2001: 28).

My own concern with Bynum's analysis hinges on her suggestion that women's food practices can be read as women's resistance to dominant Christian discourses. I will discuss in detail in the following chapter why I find theorisations of women's agency in terms of subversiveness (or in Bynum's case, resistance) problematic, but suffice to say here, I find the suggestion unlikely that the majority of medieval holy women actively resisted hegemonic discourses and that they were able to author their own spiritualities. If women were truly capable of resisting discourse to the extent that they could transcend their cultural roles and author their own models of spirituality, one has to wonder why they would have allowed themselves to be

²⁴ Salih also goes on to critique Bynum's characterisation of 'medieval pious women' as necessarily linked to food practices in light of other characterisations of medieval women, such as women as virgins (2001: 6).

subjected to such pervasive methods of oppression and marginalisation in the first place. These critiques and others have also been applied to Bynum's most recent monograph, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (2011) which concerns the ways in which materiality mattered to medieval Christians, and thus has relevance to my own research.

In *Christian Materiality*, Bynum argues for a rereading of western Christian thought and practices in the later Middle Ages in relation to holy matter. A period in which Bynum locates significant contradictions, the later Middle Ages has often been misread as simply 'superstitious' or as steeped in mysticism (2011: 274). Asserting that a more complex understanding of medieval Christianity is not only necessary to rectify historical misreadings, Bynum also challenges modern theories of 'the body' with an analysis of materiality which privileges historicity. Working within a frame 'circa 1100 to circa 1550', Bynum investigates 'Christian materiality' as one pole of the central contradiction unfolding in the later Middle Ages, :

[The] increasing prominence of holy matter in a religion also characterized by a need for human agency on the part of the faithful, a turn to interiority on the part of spiritual writers and reform-minded church leaders, and an upsurge of voluntarism, negative theology, and mysticism.

(2011: 18)

Through examining various types of holy matter, Bynum suggests that old interpretations of the later Middle Ages as mechanistically pious should be abandoned and suggests instead, that the period should be read as one of 'profound religious exploration' (*ibid.*). Focusing on the paradigm of paradox, she uses holy matter in later medieval Christianity as a way 'to understand the period's own character by taking seriously aspects usually treated cursorily or with incomprehension and condescension' (*ibid.*, 18). Her most fundamental assertion is that 'paradox lies at the heart of late medieval Christianity',²⁵ which makes holy matter 'both radical threat and radical opportunity' (2011: 34; 20). She develops this argument over four chapters: 'Visual Matter', 'The Power of Objects', 'Holy Pieces', and 'Matter and Miracles' by, in her words, 'connecting, not equating, the tactility of art, the pervasive stress on all sorts of religious objects, a shift in natural-philosophical formulations, and in the increase of miracles of material

²⁵ Bynum sees paradox as 'a basic interpretive principle', and defines it as 'the simultaneous assertion (not the reconciliation) of opposites' (2011: 34).

transformation' (*ibid.*, 30). Rather than analysing holy matter as pointing towards meaning, Bynum suggests that late medieval devotional objects manifested their meaning, and did so specifically by emphasising their own physicality: 'late medieval devotional objects speak or act their physicality in particularly intense ways that call attention to their per se "stuffness" and "thingness"' (*ibid.*, 29). For her, it is precisely this combination of (divine) performance and 'thingness' which infused Christian thinking and practice with both powerful devotion and anxiety in the later Middle Ages.

Whether one had any prior familiarity with medieval Christianity, or any knowledge of devotional objects, it seems highly unlikely that a reader of *Christian Materiality* would escape the oft-recited formula of holy matter as both threat and opportunity. Characteristic of her methodology in any number of her works, Bynum packs this analysis with historical examples, textual excerpts, and visual representations of the relics, images, and reliquaries referenced in her analysis. Employing this approach not only offers a stronger, evidence-based argument, it also enables Bynum to weave the theme of paradox into every fibre of her thesis. Bynum expertly selects visuals, anecdotes, and religious texts which constantly reinforce her assertions that paradox lay at the heart of medieval Christian praxis and theory. It is precisely her approach which I think both ensures the success of her arguments, but which also creates inconsistencies. In my view, the implications of Bynum's explorations of medieval Christian materiality are insufficiently addressed, and that they have ramifications for analyses of identity formation. Although she asserts a distance between her own work and modern theories of 'the body', the paradox of Christian materiality in the later Middle Ages did not only have implications for medieval understandings of matter. Equally impacted by medieval approaches to matter were human bodies which were characterised in terms of their gender, class, race and ability, and which were no less paradoxical in their simultaneous evocation and denial of God through their materiality. Although Bynum's work is important for understanding Christian attitudes towards materiality in the later Middle Ages, critical questions must be asked of the ways which her analysis ignores the full implications of Christian paradox for human embodiment and identity formation. What I will argue throughout this thesis therefore is that an analysis of medieval Christian attitudes towards materiality must theorise approaches to, and treatments

of, human bodies as these bear directly on the nature of medieval attitudes towards materiality.

The contribution Bynum's recent essay makes to historical studies of Christianity are numerous. Where previous approaches to the period Bynum defines as the late Middle Ages have resulted in oversimplified and static characterisations, Bynum's analysis lends complexity and dynamism, particularly to Christian praxis and theory. In locating paradox at the heart of medieval Christianity, Bynum is able to deal with the complicated relationship Christians had with materiality without fixing the period too solidly. Some studies of Christian mysticism have erected narratives of 'radical' piety; analyses of negative theological traditions have assumed the emphatic rejection of materiality; examinations of devotional objects have at times bordered on accusations of idolatry; and feminist readings of ancient and medieval theology have sometimes resulted in blanket generalisations about somatophobia. Bynum's arguments in *Christian Materiality* build a narrative of medieval Christianity which avoids all of these narrow readings, and yet which also acknowledges that attitudes and practices conveyed both fear and hope, both anxiety and enthusiasm. By insisting that one important aspect of late medieval Christianity was materiality, and that objects were central to the ways which Christians negotiated materiality, Bynum establishes a solid framework in which to further research different medieval attitudes and practices. In this framework, it becomes possible to see how mystical experiences proliferated, and how they often made use of holy matter like the Eucharist, without falling into the trap of constructing a false binary where mysticism is the 'other' to medieval orthodox Christianity. Similarly, in reading 'the Christian materiality of the later Middle Ages as paradox' (*ibid.*, 267), it is possible to understand approaches like negative theology and reliquary worship as simultaneous even if contradictory. Moreover, Bynum's explorations of theologies like the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Assumption demonstrate a very real concern with Christ's materiality, and therefore with the human body of Christ, in late medieval thinking. Far from exhibiting a flat fear of human bodies, the theologies she analyses prove that medieval Christians felt a spectrum of emotions and reacted towards human matter in ways both enthusiastic and anxious. Finally, her illumination of the wider uses of the word 'body' by Christians in the late Middle Ages demands a type of historical analysis which is necessarily intersectional

because, discussions of bodies were concerned with the ‘stuff’ of the universe, and were thus always already discussions of matter. Thus, historical analysis of medieval Christianity must become more ontological in its approach. Rather than simply relying upon theological texts or philosophical treatises as straightforward depictions of Christian understandings of bodies, Bynum’s rereading implores historians to investigate parallel processes, like the creation and reverence of images or relics, in order to capture the ways in which Christians navigated the coming to be, and passing away of matter.

In this light, art historical analyses and analyses concerned with medieval material culture must also engage the performative aspect of bodies. The ceaseless processes of generation and corruption medieval Christians saw in matter; the eruptions of miracles; and the anxiety resulting from the need to control miraculous performance suggest that analyses of devotional objects must embrace complex approaches where what’s at issue is not simply the agency of the faithful, nor simply the agency of the object. Indeed, Bynum writes, ‘until we understand medieval art in a new way—until we see how it plays with, uses, and interrogates materiality—we will not understand what it is that we need to explain’ (*ibid.*, 52). The kind of scholarship Bynum demonstrates in her investigation of medieval Christian materiality, and by extension, that she demands from other scholars engaged in the field, is sophisticated, attentive and intersectional. However, having established the success of Bynum’s essay, it is also important to outline some of the problems in her method, as well as in her analysis. First, and perhaps most superficially, Bynum’s chronology and geography are slightly perplexing. Towards the end of her essay, she discusses the changing scholarly opinions regarding periodisation, but she nevertheless includes six centuries under the rubric of ‘the late Middle Ages’ (*ibid.*, 272-273). Similarly, she talks about western Christendom as though it is a homogeneous geographical entity when in fact she purports to cover the UK, northern Europe, and some Mediterranean countries like Spain and Italy. This is even more confusing insofar as the majority of her analysis concerns England and northern Europe, with only a handful of examples coming from Spain and Italy.²⁶

²⁶ Including Italy as a single, homogenous entity would be problematic enough in itself. From at least 1350 onwards, the various kingdoms and republics in what we now call Italy

Further, despite Bynum's stated disinterest in discussing periodisation, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in the vast majority of traditional, and current Renaissance scholarship, Italy's Middle Ages are not understood to extend past the mid-fourteenth century, let alone into the two centuries following. All of this is perplexing because Bynum herself claims to want to free the 'Middle Ages' from problems embedded in older interpretations of the time period, and therefore argues fiercely for historicity, yet she unabashedly collapses six centuries, and numerous populations into 'late medieval western Christendom'.²⁷ Her characterisation of the Renaissance is similarly problematic. At no point in her analysis does she specify when the Renaissance might be dated, although it appears that she understands it to occur after 1550. Further, she draws rather sharp distinctions between the way medieval art behaves, and the ways in which Renaissance art functioned (*ibid.*, 28). Relying on a single, ancient text,²⁸ Bynum asserts that all Renaissance art had as its aim mimesis and illusion. Again, it is hard to understand how, on the one hand Bynum could argue for abandoning readings of history which see clear breaks between the Middle Ages and subsequent periods of history, and yet on the other, how she can demarcate medieval art as distinctly different from Renaissance art. Further, her own desire to strip away previous, overly-narrow characterisations of the Middle Ages is undermined by her one-dimensional depiction of the Renaissance. I am not suggesting that some Renaissance art did not rely on the very characteristics which Bynum describes, or that the text to which she refers was not indeed referenced by some artists, but it is unreasonable to suggest that all Renaissance art can be summed up in such a way, or that the entire population of artists were guided by a single text.

One other occurrence of this type of conflation, which runs contrary to her historicist claims, is her discussion—and seeming dismissal—of modern theories concerning 'the body'. In her essay entitled 'Why All the Fuss about the Body' (1995), Bynum gives a brief, but reasonably thorough, survey of modern attempts to theorise

were often at war with one another, and experienced chronological shifts--like the Renaissance--quite characteristically and independently of one another.

²⁷ This is especially curious for a scholar whose critique of modern theories concerning the agency of objects is that they do not take account of theories concurrent with the objects they study; or whose widening of the definition of 'body' in medieval history is a result of what she considers to be the modern misuse of the term.

²⁸ She refers to Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, completed around 77AD (2011: 57-58).

‘the body’. She concludes that so many approaches to, and so many definitions of, the body have reduced modern theories to a level of meaninglessness. Feminist methodologies, she suggests, focus too intently on things like sex and gender, and in their readings of historical discourses, misrepresent certain theories as flatly misogynist and therefore make it impossible to speak as inheritors of bodies rendered within those theories (1995: 1-6).²⁹ Further, she suggests in *Christian Materiality* that there is a ‘modern tendency to treat the body mostly as a locus of sexual expressivity, gender, or sexual orientation’ (2011: 297, n. 48). Despite including a notable array of texts in her 1995 essay, Bynum nevertheless draws them all together to reach several conclusions about the modern study of the body. By the conclusion of this older essay, it’s hard to avoid feeling as though she has not collapsed all modern theories into one, confused, uncomfortable—and it seems, unsuccessful—attempt to make sense of the body which she has no qualms in writing off as it is entirely anachronistic to the Middle Ages (2011: n. 48, 297). Whilst I agree with some of Bynum’s claims in her 1995 essay, her own work in *Christian Materiality* relies on an openness to the simultaneous assertion of contradicting premises and yet she suggests that this very occurrence within modern theories of the body makes them meaningless. Similarly, Bynum locates in medieval Christian paradox instances of both celebration and extreme anxiety towards matter, an effort she suggests is worthwhile in the face of constructing a more complex narrative. However, she seems to characterise the discomfort which arises from the modern field of theory concerning bodies as a mark of their failure (1995: 6). Ultimately, it seems as if Bynum conflates all modern theories of the body in an effort to distinguish her own approach to medieval attitudes towards materiality.

Bynum’s reliance on texts—both theological and philosophical—also proves problematic and creates lacunae in her investigation of medieval Christian materiality. Although she admits that texts written by ecclesiastical authorities, intellectuals, and theologians are not representative of medieval Christian attitudes and behaviours, and that texts cannot be read as the sole generators of praxis, she nevertheless bases a large part of her conclusions on elite texts. Here the problem is not so much that elite texts represent only a small demographic of medieval

²⁹ In *Christian Materiality* however, she does seem to acknowledge the changes adopted by feminist historians in their investigations of theories of mind and body. See 2011: 297, n. 48,.

Christianity—she argues persuasively that the slippages in the texts may be demonstrative of wider attitudes. Instead, her consistent reliance upon these texts constructs medieval Christian paradox as an even balance between threat and opportunity, and therefore ignores the real, material damage which Christian discourses on matter sometimes engendered. Despite her brief discussions of the politics of holy matter, Bynum seems reluctant to engage fully with the *material* implications of the various modes of persecution waged in regards to matter. She touches on the ways in which sinful bodies were portrayed as rotting and putrefying (2011: 71), on medieval understandings of leprosy as ‘living decay’ (*ibid.*, 186), and on the use of Dauerwunder by clergy to ‘other’ the poor, women, and Jews but at each point where it seems that Bynum must assess the social effects these conceptualisations engendered, she defaults to her formula of paradox. Paradox becomes a stable, static entity for Bynum where the threat of social neglect and ostracism is always held in equal balance with the theoretical opportunity of meeting God through the material. She does this, I would suggest, primarily through the regular evocation of elite texts which theorised matter as both threat and opportunity. Of course, because these texts are elite, there is something at stake for their authors in maintaining the God-in-matter formula, especially as they are capitalising on the not-God element to enforce cultural limitations. Bynum does not explore these historical moments of inequity. In his review of Bynum’s earlier book, Roy Porter suggests reading sceptically in order to avoid ‘being lulled into a false sense of the sweet reasonableness of these medieval doctrines’ (1996: 1145). Praising her ability to characterise medieval Christianity in such a way that avoids patronising it, Porter nonetheless notes that the accent in Bynum’s book ‘is upon the rationality and emotionally satisfying qualities of Christian doctrines’ and she thus produces “‘mild” readings of body doctrine’ (*ibid.*). I would echo Porter’s characterisation of Bynum’s earlier work in regard to her more recent work on Christian materiality. In maintaining the stable presence of paradox derived from elite texts, Bynum avoids assessment of medieval Christian practices that seemed to dissolve almost entirely into anxious or fearful approaches. This is particularly the case with the materiality of human bodies, especially in respect of their various combinations of gender, class, race, and ability. The ways in which women’s bodies, for instance, were characterised as more corrupted, lustful, and material was of

course, in tension with Christian understandings of all matter as imbued with God's (perfect, eternal) power. Nevertheless, there are innumerable examples of damaging practices which were enacted because of the threat of women's materiality. Instances of cloistering, persecution, and economic exclusion reflected the understanding of women's flesh as more imbued with corruption and decay, such that the simultaneous assertion of the threat and opportunity of matter cannot be read in equal parts. In surveying texts and objects concerned with medieval Christian materiality, but mostly avoiding the various social contexts in which they appeared,³⁰ Bynum is able to construct a narrative of the late Middle Ages which is informed by a stable and almost redemptive paradox. Though it is certainly the case that the paradox of materiality did sometimes unfold in ways which gave medieval Christians equal access to the divine, just as it evoked feelings of anxiety within them, there were also instances when the emphasis within the paradox of matter shifted, and the threat that shift engendered resulted in real social inequities.

This tendency of avoidance in Bynum's work, particularly in regards to human bodies, is also the basis for my final critique. Although she states that she is concerned with Christian attitudes towards the 'stuff of the universe', and that in the late Middle Ages the paradox of materiality was anchored in objects of devotion, she nevertheless concedes that discourses concerning matter were also about human bodies (2011: 175, 283). As I mentioned previously, Bynum's frustration with modern theoretical approaches to 'the body' is based on a number of factors, not least the misreading of the term 'body' in medieval texts. In both *Christian Materiality*, as well as in her earlier essay, she states that whatever conclusions were previously drawn by other scholars, her work does not focus on the body as locus of personhood, or as the site of gender and sexuality (1995: 1-6; 2011: n. 47-48, 296-297). Insisting that medieval Christians were concerned with bodies in the sense of things in the world, Bynum goes to great pains to distance her research from

³⁰ My use of the word 'mostly' is operative here. In chapter two, Bynum does include a section entitled 'Holy Matter in Social Context' and she observes, '[animated] objects provided occasions for blame of self and blame of other; both could lead--the one by paranoid projection, the other by direct persecution--to the torture, expulsion, and murder of dissidents and outsiders. Not only did holy stuff proliferate, its very lability became a mechanism for reproach and accusation' (2011: 171). I am not suggesting that Bynum is unaware of social context, but rather that she limits her discussion to issues of persecution, and claims to authority by clergy. I think what is missing is an analysis of every-day social constructions of power which dictated what modes of living were available and to whom.

scholars who would investigate medieval understandings of identity. Therefore, as I have already implied, Bynum's analysis of materiality often stops short when she reaches a point at which discussing 'the person' seems inevitable;³¹ her analysis centres on objects, stuff, things as she repeatedly insists. I would suggest that if one were to read *Christian Materiality* as Bynum describes her own method of reading elite medieval texts—a ferreting out of slippages, cracks, and undercurrents—the human body comes unavoidably into the frame. Despite her best efforts, Bynum's analysis reveals that medieval understandings of Christian materiality were also about human bodies and did sometimes include concerns about sexuality, genderedness, and personhood. For example, in her discussion of leprosy, Bynum explains that in the late Middle Ages the disease was understood as a consequence of sin:

Associated with sexual transgression, which was thought to be the occasion for its transmission, leprosy was seen not merely as sickness but also as a particularly virulent manifestation of sin and of God's wrath at sin.

(2011: 186)

She incorporates this fact in order to illuminate medieval Christian fears of putrefaction but it also reveals attitudes towards human bodies which display 'moral decadence'. The horror expressed by medieval Christians in response to leprosy is not simply a fear of putrefaction, but also a concern with human matter corroded by sexual sinfulness. The link in medieval thinking between sexual transgression and corrupted flesh has been well documented—even by Bynum herself—and although on the one hand, it conveys an anxiety about the process of material putrefaction more generally, on the other, it reveals medieval concerns with human materiality more specifically. Bynum's discussion of the iconography of Christ's side wound similarly reveals the ways in which human, sexed bodies were a part of Christian understandings of matter. Insisting that the iconographical association of Christ with female anatomy is purely a function of conveying

³¹ A critique of *Christian Materiality* that echoes my own is Boon 2012: 830-834. Boon similarly points towards the lack of temporal and contextual specificity in Bynum's work, suggesting that for studies seeking to adopt a similar methodology, refining the scope 'may result in local nuances to how matter was assessed, for some areas of Europe or eras in culture may have put more weight on mutability, others on transformation, still others on paradox' (2012: 833). Regarding Bynum's neglect of the human body, Boon writes that even as a 'sub-category of materiality', the position of the body 'cannot leave aside the advances in analysis of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability that appear only in passing in this work' (*ibid.*).

maternity, Bynum seems oddly to want to draw a distinction between motherhood and 'erotic' sex. Of images depicting Jesus in a notably female way, she writes,

Explicitly female images of Jesus in the Middle Ages stress gestating, birthing, and lactating, not sexual union. Nestling within is usually an image of conception or reconception. When apostrophized, the breasts of Jesus are explicitly identified with food, not erotic stimulation. [...] The blood Christ shed on the cross is analogous to the blood of birthing, and this birthing, paradoxically, precedes conception.

(2011: 197)

She goes on to suggest that depictions in which the side wound of Christ appear to us (modern viewers) like a vagina were almost always connected with birthing, and the implication therefore, is that they most certainly could not have carried sexualised undertones. In light of scholarship like Amy Hollywood's (2002), or Susannah Mary Chewning's (2005) where the relationship between sexuality and spirituality is conceptualised as just that—relationship—one wonders what is at stake for Bynum in insisting that female images of Jesus are completely divorced from the erotic.³² In spite of her attempts to demarcate medieval attitudes towards matter as separate from human sexuality and personhood, even Bynum has to admit that bawdy medieval literature, and badges and medallions featuring human genitalia suggest that medieval Christians were aware of the 'sexual and fetishising overtones' of some devotional themes (2011: 200). She frames these objects, however, in a discussion of humour and parody, ultimately characterising them as indicative of a genre, separate it seems, from what she considers to be holy matter. To be clear, I am not suggesting that modern definitions of sexuality, sexual expression, genderedness, or identity are present and of primary importance in all medieval concepts of Christian materiality. For the most part, I think Bynum has it right in suggesting that what mattered was matter. What I object to, however, is her erasure from medieval Christian materiality of human bodies, sexual expression, and concerns about personhood. As I have suggested, even within her own analysis, Bynum betrays her mission to distance her research from histories concerned with

³² Karma Lochrie answers this query by arguing that what is at stake in Bynum's dismissal of sexual overtones is her 'overall strategy in much of her work on rehabilitating in the study of women's mysticism from some admittedly reductive views of sex and sexual repression' (1997: 183). Nevertheless, Lochrie affirms Bynum's tendency to 'steadfastly [deny] or [ignore] the sexual and erotic as categories of investigation' and through her reading of the maternal in particular, to 'cancel out the sexual... to avoid any queer tendencies' (*ibid.*, 183-187).

human identity precisely because materiality was also about human persons. In fourteenth-century Florence, for instance, elaborate Aristotelian theories of embryology were written and circulated amongst theologians and intellectuals. At issue in these theories was, as Bynum suggests, the ways in which matter came to be, and how partition could result in wholeness. What was also at issue, though, was the pressing concern that women's materiality be conceptually divorced from the generation of a baby, particularly if the baby was a boy. Because women's flesh, womb, and bodily fluids were conceived of as corrupted, sinful, and overly sexualized, theories of material genesis were necessarily constructed in exceedingly complicated ways so that the person generated could be understood as truly in God's image, and by extension, in the image of the father (Klapisch-Zuber 1985). Even discussions of holy matter in the form of images, relics, reliquaries and the like, had implications for, and revealed anxieties about human bodies. Theories of materiality were not simply written about stuff, they were also written about persons. And theories which explored Christ's materiality were both about establishing his perfection and divinity, and about the processes of materiality which would make the perfect resurrection of the 'ordinary faithful' possible too.

Ultimately, Bynum's work offers a valuable approach to studies of Christianity in the late Middle Ages, but the bottom line is that an analysis of Christian materiality which stubbornly tries to focus solely on objects is not enough. I will argue throughout this thesis that an important aspect of Christian understandings of holy matter, and of the processes of materiality, was how human bodies could fit into that frame. Further, I will suggest that the implications of medieval Christian materiality directly affected the formation and performance of personhood. Because the heart of Christian understandings of matter was paradox, medieval discourses necessarily produced mutually imbricated, yet irreconcilable modes of being. Moreover, because paradox is not a stable or static paradigm, I want to suggest that within some historical contexts, damaging social 'norms' were constructed and upheld as a result of the threat posed by certain types of matter such that opposing theories concerning the opportunity of materiality were significantly delineated. I will be interested specifically in the ways in which norms of gender and class resulted in embodiments which were constructed as more threat than opportunity.

V. *Structure of the Thesis*

‘Religion’, Ellen Armour writes, ‘like gender and sexuality (and often with them), is a site where language, materiality, theory, and politics all come together in complex ways’ (Armour and St. Ville eds. 2006: ix). In the following chapters, I endeavour to construct a critical theoretical reading of the complex ways religious language and materiality intersected in the formation and performance of embodied gendered identities in fourteenth-century Florence. Although the focus of my research is on the lived experiences of *trecento* Florentine women, this thesis is nevertheless a modern, theoretical project; not only am I able, as a scholar working in the 21st century, to access a wide variety of texts that, as a body, would not have been available to *trecento* Florentines themselves, but also, my reading of these texts has been informed by current academic theories. The structure of my thesis, therefore, interweaves the theories that inform my methodology with historiographical research and the analysis of primary historical data. Effectively I have tried to conduct a hybridisation of theoretical thought that remains accountable to historical specificity, and which discloses modes of agential action that pushed and stretched the discursive boundaries of embodied subjectivity in fourteenth-century Florence.

Chapter One begins with an outline of those theories that inform my methodology for reading fourteenth-century Florentine religious discourses as formative of, and performed by, gendered embodied subjects. In the collected volume *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (2006), Armour et al. bring the work of Judith Butler into conversation with studies of religion in order to discuss new possibilities for conceptualising gendered, sexed, queer or embodied identities within various religious settings. Similarly, my thesis builds on Butler’s work in order to establish the ways in which fourteenth-century soteriological discourses were formative of embodied gendered identities. However, in addition to exploring how religious discourses produced gendered identities, I am also interested in how *trecento* religious discourses were productive and formative more generally. Tracing Butler’s theories of performativity back to JL Austin, I begin my analysis by examining speech act theory. I extend this theoretical exploration by synthesising the work of Jason BeDuhn who, following Quentin Skinner’s synthesis of JL Austin, examines the ways speech act theory may be applied constructively to studies of

religion. I suggest that although BeDuhn's approach does indeed improve previous attempts at acclimating speech act theory to the study of religions, he and his predecessors still rely on the fiction of the stable, speaking, male subject position. This gender-blind approach not only fails to account for subject positions which diverge from the 'norm', it also does not account sufficiently for 'infelicities' in the effects of speech acts. As a corrective, or rather an additive, I assert that employing Butler's theories of performativity allows for a fuller, more complex reading; one which explains both the gendered effects of some historical discourses and which takes into account the ruptures, slips and ambiguities. The conclusions Butler reaches regarding discursive slips and ambiguities are not unproblematic, however. I argue that Butler, like many other feminists, relies on a binary model of agency that suggests that all subjective actions are either collusive with, or subversive of dominant discourses. Following from Saba Mahmood's querying of this kind of presentation, I critique this feminist model of the subject, suggesting that within my own case study, women's agential actions cannot be explained simply in terms of collusion or subversion. Making my theoretical propositions clear, I move from this methodological discussion in the following chapter to detail the historical context of my case study.

In Chapter Two, I set the historical scene for my investigation of women's embodiment in fourteenth-century Florence. As a result of intense and violent conflicts between noble Florentine Guelfs and Ghibellines, Florentines grew increasingly suspicious and wary of the nobility throughout the thirteenth century and by the fourteenth century, noble families were denied access to civic positions of power, leaving room for the merchant classes to expand. I thus discuss not only the changing political and economic conditions of Florence, but also the dynamic physical configuration of the city. Rapid expansion and growth meant an influx of population, a factor that had both positive and negative ramifications for the *commune* as a whole. The plague of 1348 meant that an astonishing percentage of the population was wiped out owing to the heavily populated conditions of the city. On the other hand, however, it also meant that the work force was only marginally affected. Reflecting on *trecento* Florentine society as a whole, I survey Florentine familial structures, standards of education, and the growing industry of arts production. The ways in which Florentine women were subject to 'damaging' social

circumstances by being commoditised in the marriage market, marginalised in educational settings, and eventually erased from public society by being kept sequestered in their homes begin to become apparent. My discussion in this chapter also enables an assessment of the ‘damaging’ effects of the Florentine ‘class structure’ and the increased marginalisation of working-class Florentine men who were neither citizens nor guild members; for the women in these positions, their marginalisation was compounded by the ways their subject positions as (virtuous) ‘women’ were also emphatically contested. I also deal in Chapter Two with Florentine religious life, outlining important changes to the religious landscape, like the growing prominence of the mendicants (beginning in the thirteenth century); the materialisation of purgatory as a widely-held paradigm; increased participation of women within religious communities; the impact of the plague; and conflicts throughout the second half of the *trecento* with the Holy See. Ultimately, Chapter Two seeks to demonstrate the dynamic, and sometimes tumultuous, landscape within which Florentines’ embodied identities were formed.

I continue my analysis of Florentine ‘religion’ in Chapter Three by identifying three major doctrinal currents that came to the fore of Florentine religious life. I argue that of prime importance were doctrines of salvation; for fourteenth-century Florentines this primacy resulted in a variety of discourses but few were as prominent as *imitatio Christi*. The discourses centred on the imitation of Christ not only increased practices meant to mirror Christ’s actions during his life, but they also helped to affirm the male body as the ‘normative ideal’ in *trecento* Florence. Intimately interlinked to doctrines of salvation, and the imitation of Christ, were eschatological concerns about purgatory. Related to a growing obsession with Christ’s life—including his resurrection—Florentines began to discuss in great detail the possible destinations for the afterlife and, equally important, the psychosomatic conditions of these destinations. The bodily and spiritual conditions of the afterlife point towards the final current that I identify in *trecento* Florence: materiality. Affirming Bynum’s research on Christian materiality, I discuss the ways in which matter came to matter to fourteenth-century Florentines. However, in contrast to Bynum’s analyses, I suggest that the paradox of matter—as it was both ‘threat’ and ‘promise’—was not consistent or stable, and for fourteenth-century Florentine women, their materiality was overwhelmingly conceptualised as ‘threat’. In order to

examine more concisely the ways these doctrinal currents intersected to create discourses that were formative of gendered embodiment, Chapter Three narrows the focus even further to outline how the major doctrinal currents were manifested in fourteenth-century Florentine interpretations of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Further, I discuss why these virtues were of particular importance to *trecento* Florentines. Essentially, the centrality of Christ's life to Florentine spirituality meant that these virtues, granted to humanity by God, were perfectly manifested in Christ and thus, discourses of *imitatio Christi* were heavily informed by them. I discuss the historical circumstances that helped to isolate charity as the most formative of the virtues for *trecento* Florentines. An increasing discomfort with their growing wealth meant that many middle- and upper-class Florentines were mitigating their spiritual dis-ease through charitable practices or membership in charitable confraternities. The waves of plague also created real material need amongst the *popolo* and charitable hospitals became one of the primary conduits for the sick and dying. The prominence of the Franciscans in particular meant that Francis of Assisi also became a compelling symbol of charity. Finally, Christ's commandment to his disciples to love their neighbours as themselves meant to Florentines that acts of charity were an integral part of imitating Christ.

In order to demonstrate the ways these discourses were formative of gendered embodiment, I begin Chapter Four by providing basic *trecento* theological definitions of the three virtues. I then offer a brief survey of some of the most influential writers—Augustine (d. 430),³³ Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274),³⁴ Peter Lombard (d. 1161),³⁵ and Bonaventure (d. 1274)³⁶—on the theological virtues

³³ Augustine was a theologian of the Patristic era who eventually became bishop of Hippo and who is widely considered to be one of the Church Fathers. His texts are numerous and were hugely influential throughout the medieval and early modern periods. For a biographical source see Chadwick 2009.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas was a thirteenth-century Dominican scholastic theologian. His theologies combined works from the Church Fathers with classical texts, particularly those of Aristotle. His most well-known work was *Summa Theologiæ* (hereafter cited as *ST*). Further biographical information can be found in Tugwell 1988.

³⁵ Peter Lombard was a twelfth-century theologian whose teaching and exegesis earned him a place amongst the canons of Notre Dame. His most well-known and influential text was *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum* (hereafter cited as *Sentences*). For a basic biography, see Colish 1994: 15-23.

whose works were instrumental to Florentine discourse. My analysis in this chapter, of these texts' importance to *trecento* Florentines, demonstrates the ways they were concerned with salvation, as well as with the materiality of the human body. Further, I discuss how discourses of faith, hope and charity were gendered by investigating constructions of gender in *trecento* discourses of charity. Women were, on the one hand, characterised as ideal practitioners of charity because of their bodiliness (and therefore their approximation to the human body of Christ), their greater affect, and because of their normative roles as food-preparers and care-takers. On the other hand, however, these very same traits also meant that women were deemed incapable of pursuing their salvation independently of rational, male spiritual authority. I conclude the chapter by discussing the ways constructions of 'woman', within the context of discourses of charity, contributed to the proliferation of behavioural guides written by male spiritual authorities and civic leaders. This discussion will highlight the paradoxical ways discourses of virtues—and particularly charity—materialised ambiguous and damaging modes of embodiment for women. Moreover, I show how these guides are another source where women's lived experiences of charity are obscured by the reiterative discursive constructions of norms. I suggest, therefore, that an analysis of women's lived experiences which seeks to understand Florentine women's agency, must extend beyond textual sources. By examining some examples of women's charitable commissions of ritual art, I argue that it becomes possible to see the ways women negotiated the formative discourses outlined, and thus to understand how women performed their agency.

Chapter Five explores how soteriological discourses of charity were not only represented in *trecento* texts, but also how they were productive of art. I begin this chapter by outlining the reasons that art is an important source for my research. First, I offer a brief critique of scholarship which relies solely on 'elite texts' for reasons pertaining to access and literacy. Second, I suggest that art is an important resource because fourteenth-century art was performative. In other words, Florentine art *did* things; it was instructive, functional and frequently, miraculous.

³⁶ Bonaventure was a thirteenth-century Franciscan scholastic theologian who eventually became the Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor. His writings were heavily influenced by Augustine and spanned from scholastic texts for university students to meditational texts for men and women religious. He is most well-known for writing the officially sanctioned *vita* of Francis of Assisi and for composing the influential meditational text *Lignum vitae* (LV). Further biographical information can be found in Cullen 2006: 3-22.

Finally, I again supplement my own analysis of the importance of *trecento* ritual art with Bynum's discussion of materiality to survey the ways the 'stuff' of art mattered. In an attempt to contextualise the art investigated in Chapter Six, I provide a brief art-historical overview of *trecento* art and explore Florentine women's relationship with this art, specifically. I propose that art was as formative of women's embodiment as other types of 'text'. First I discuss the ways art played a role in reinforcing women's bodies as damaged through associating the figure of 'woman' with Eve, with the devil, and with death. I then look at how the virtues directed at women through behavioural guides clearly positioned women as 'in need' of such guidance. I balance this analysis by also suggesting that ritual art was a means for women to attempt to occupy more normative subject positions. I conclude the chapter with a basic outline of the various ways women were capable of accessing, commissioning, and venerating art in *trecento* Florence.

VI. Three Case Studies of Women's Commissions

The final chapter of this thesis examines three specific examples of fourteenth-century Florentine women's commissions. Examining the three examples given in Chapter Six demonstrates how *trecento* women showed agency by negotiating virtues such that they were allowed to make themselves visible and central in their funerary commissions. I begin with the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility*, painted by Pietro Lorenzetti, c. 1340. Painted to commemorate the life of the Blessed Humility (born Rosanese dei Negusanti), the altarpiece is unique for the ways in which it configures a female model of sanctity that seems to depart from concurrent models like the one focused on Clare of Assisi. My analysis of the altarpiece engages first with Cordelia Warr's art historical research of the same piece. Although her work is informative, the conclusions Warr draws regarding the intentions of the female patron of the painting are problematic. In order to demonstrate the ways the Humility altarpiece is expressive of the patron's (and Humility's) agency, Warr compares the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility* to a contemporary dossal of Claire of Assisi; this comparison shows, she argues, the subversiveness of the former and the submissiveness of the latter. In so doing, Warr equates the female patron's agency with subversive action.

I offer a constructive critique of Warr's conclusions and suggest that a reading of *trecento* Florentine women's embodied agency cannot be analysed sufficiently in dichotomous terms of subversion or submission. I then propose an alternative reading of the Humility altarpiece wherein I demonstrate how the painting both displays normative discursive definitions of 'Woman' as well as exhibits elements that push back at those discursive boundaries. More specifically, I argue that the painting associates the female body with sickness and death and it affirms the male mode of spiritual embodiment as the idealised norm. However, because of the ways the patron negotiated her own position as 'Woman', and thus the discursive construction of female embodiment as sick, as close to death and as non-normative, certain elements of the painting stretch the boundaries of orthodox definitions of the salvation-worthy body. For example, in the Humility altarpiece, female embodiment is central (instead of marginal); it is highly visible (as opposed to being made invisible); and it is closely associated with Christ. Moreover, the very function of the piece—as an altarpiece—meant that the patron's and Humility's spiritual embodiments became objects of devotion and worship. Building on the example established by my reading of the Humility altarpiece, I utilise the second half of the chapter to propose two additional case studies. Namely, I investigate the contexts and iconography of Giotto's *Pietà* from San Remigio (c. 1360-1365) and the frescoes in the former refectory of Santa Croce (c. 1330-1360) by Taddeo Gaddi. In these two case studies, I determine the ways the paintings both reinforce normative discursive definitions of women's embodiments, as well as identify ways in which the patrons were able to push back at those definitions with pictorial representations that bring the female body to the fore, that establish an immediate connection with Christ, and thus, that reconfigure women's spiritual embodiment as worthy of salvation. These paintings, I argue, exemplify women's attempts at occupying more normative embodied subject positions in their pursuit of salvation and thus, may be read as expressions of agency.

In concluding the thesis, I assert that *trecento* Florentine religious discourses, such as those surrounding the doctrine of charity, simultaneously produced women's bodies as damaged alongside women's desires for their embodiments to approximate the 'normative ideal'. This performative process materialised not only

through sermons and texts (such as behavioural guides), but also through certain types of art. However, even though some art reinforced women as damaged, sometimes women's own commissions performed in different ways. Some ritual commissions indicate the ways in which women negotiated religious discourses such that they made themselves visible and central, thereby stretching the definitional boundaries of salvation-worthy subjects. Not subversive of norms, nor purely collusive, women's commissions can be read as attempts to occupy 'normative subject positions' and therefore as expressions of agency. That said, they often had to die in order to access art this way, and so although we may read *trecento* women's commissions in such a way as to locate historical examples of female agency, we must acknowledge that these examples were situated in and the result of damaging religious discourses.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORY AND METHOD

The argument that religious discourses are formative of and performed by gendered bodies is rooted in the theoretical belief that ‘speech is action’. The theories that inform my methodology build on speech act theory and suggest that discourses produce what they name. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical assumptions that underpin my methodological approach to analysing the effects of *trecento* religious discourses on the formation of women’s corporeal identities. This discussion begins with an examination of the work of Jason BeDuhn whose analyses of established speech act theories (as presented by JL Austin and subsequently, Quentin Skinner) focuses specifically on the ways in which religious forms of speech act. BeDuhn’s critiques of previous theoretical scholars demonstrate problematic assumptions about the speaking subject, and further, they help to complicate concepts of agency, particularly within the context of the study of religions. Nonetheless, BeDuhn, like Austin and Skinner before him, does not sufficiently address the ways in which constructions of gender affect a subject’s ability to speak, or the varied ways speech affects embodied subjects specific to their gender identity. I argue that the application of speech act theory to historical studies of religion must necessarily take into account gender and thus, Judith Butler’s theories of performativity provide a helpful supplement to traditional speech act theories. Similar to Austin et al., Butler asserts that gendered identities are formed through the iteration and reiteration of dominant discourses. However, her analysis takes into account the damaging material ramifications for those gendered bodies that do not conform to discursive norms. Further, she argues that even in spite of seemingly hegemonic normative definitions of embodiment, it is still possible to identify expressions of agency. Regarding *trecento* Florentine women’s embodiments though, I suggest that Butler’s theories of agency as subversion or disruption of normative discourses are somewhat anachronistic. The second half of the chapter then, centres on a critique of the feminist subject. Building on the work of Saba Mahmood, I argue that Butler’s concept of agency as subversion of discourse is echoed by many feminist scholars who seek to identify women’s agency within hegemonic discursive structures. In reference to my research, I demonstrate that this is a problem for feminist historians

of religion by providing a brief survey of analyses that endeavour to define women's agency as undermining the religious discourses within which their corporeal identities are formed and performed. I conclude the chapter by suggesting the ways my own analyses of *trecento* Florentine women's embodiment departs from feminist scholarship which seeks to define women's agency strictly in terms of subversion or collusion.

I. Speech Act Theory & the Study of Religions

In his 2000 journal publication, Jason BeDuhn critically synthesizes JL Austin's speech act theory,¹ particularly as it was taken up by Quentin Skinner.² Arguing that much of Skinner's application of speech act theory to historiography has been misread,³ BeDuhn rereads and clarifies Skinner in the hopes of establishing a theoretical approach for historical studies of religions. Specifically, BeDuhn argues that speech act theory may provide a 'source for useful taxonomies of religious utterances', as well as a 'basis for emphasizing the function of language as a form of religious action or performance' (2000: 477). Skinner's work should be an integral element to this theoretical approach, BeDuhn argues, because 'his approach would seem to have intrinsic value for a field like religious studies, where historical-critical models have dominated' (*ibid.*) Although I would argue that BeDuhn's analysis of Skinner is not critical enough, he nevertheless highlights several key points of Skinner's speech act theory which have been misapplied in previous scholarly literature.⁴ Further, BeDuhn's own synthesis of Austin and Skinner provides a compelling possibility for approaching historical studies of religion. Nonetheless, I believe Skinner's, and to some extent BeDuhn's, applications of speech act theory are insufficient insofar as they fail to take gender into account. As a result, the very basis upon which Skinner builds his theoretical approaches to historiography presupposes a stable, rational, male subject. This becomes problematic for Skinner, and subsequently for BeDuhn, in regards to discussions of agency, intention, and

¹ BeDuhn deals with two of Austin's texts; namely 1970 and 1975.

² For the full list of Skinner's texts referenced in BeDuhn's analysis, see the Bibliography in BeDuhn 2000: 505.

³ For critiques of Skinner, and for his responses, see Tully 1988.

⁴ BeDuhn suggests that most of the 'key clarifications' needed in Skinner's analyses centre on Skinner's use of 'the rhetoric of intentionality' (2000: 478).

when dealing with ‘infelicities’. Engaging Judith Butler’s theories of performativity alongside BeDuhn’s application of Skinner, I argue, allows for a more complete analysis. BeDuhn begins by outlining the fundamental elements of Austin’s speech act theory:

In brief, a full understanding of any utterance must take into consideration at least three possible⁵ levels of significance: locution, illocution, and perlocution. Locution is the significance or “force” that an utterance has as a transmitter of information, assessed in terms of its linguistic content and references. Illocution is the significance an utterance has (or may have) as a performance or an end in itself, assessed in terms of indigenous conventions involving decrees, oaths, promises, warnings, reprimands, liturgical phrases, and so forth. In other words, it is “the performance of an act *in* saying something”. Perlocution is the significance an utterance has as a tool, or a means to an end, assessed primarily in terms of the response of the utterance’s hearers. Most simply, it is the effects produced *by* saying something.

(2000: 479)

We may look at modern Christian wedding vows as an example. When we open the Book of Common Prayer (for instance), we may rely on locution to determine the ‘force’ of the text. The content—a ceremony—and the references—to concepts like union, fidelity, love, etc.—enable us to determine that the text is for performing a wedding. Illocution rests in the priest’s recognised authority to pronounce the bride and groom, husband and wife; illocution is the significance in the phrase, ‘I now pronounce you husband and wife’. Perlocution, in this instance, would be the materialisation of a married couple; that the congregation suddenly sees before them a husband and wife demonstrates the perlocution of the ceremony. BeDuhn suggests that in Skinner’s analysis of Austin, the three levels of significance are framed in relation to ‘intentional behavior’:

Thus Skinner arrives at the conclusion that a locutionary act occurs when a speaker intends to communicate information; an illocutionary act when she intends to enact a performative; a perlocutionary act when she intends to achieve a certain response to her speech.

(2000: 479)

Applying ‘intentional descriptions of action’ is, as BeDuhn suggests, highly problematic. In the first place, Skinner’s interpretation seems to miss the point of

⁵ BeDuhn uses the word ‘possible’ here because, as he notes, ‘not every utterance has all three levels of significance, although many have more than one’ (2000: 479).

Austin's theorisation; '[as] Austin makes clear elsewhere, an illocution (or performative utterance) is done even if the doer has an intention at odds with it. [...] Austin coined the term illocution to refer to an aspect of speech whereby the very uttering of something accomplishes an action' (*ibid.*, 480-481). BeDuhn further points to the impossibility of recovering historical individual intentions. He writes, '[accounts] of the past in terms of individual intentions are historical fictions that may be plausible and convenient, but never proved' (*ibid.*, 481). Despite this point of disagreement, BeDuhn nevertheless attempts to unpick further Skinner's use of intentionality.

For Skinner, BeDuhn asserts, discussing speech acts becomes a fruitless exercise unless they can be characterised as deliberate, voluntary actions of individuals. Skinner does not mean to reflect on an individual's subjective state; rather he argues that analysing an actor's intentions is about identifying possible ranges of meanings. BeDuhn suggests that, 'when Skinner speaks of "what an agent *may have* intended or meant", he is referring to the set of possibilities in the environment within which the agent lived' (*ibid.*). What Skinner characterises as 'determining intentions', therefore, BeDuhn argues is simply identifying the conventions or conditions which governed the use of a speech act in a given time and place. BeDuhn writes, that according to Skinner's scheme, 'the first task of historical research, therefore, is placing a speaker's speech act within its own historical or cultural context and establishing what could have been its force in that context' (*ibid.*, 482). Given this definition, one wonders why it remains necessary for Skinner to maintain intentionality as an element of his speech act theory. As BeDuhn demonstrates, a myriad of misunderstandings arose contemporaneously with Skinner's first works, and continue to act as a point of contention for scholars of speech act theory today. According to BeDuhn, there are two primary factors which motivate Skinner to maintain an analysis which depends on intention. First, BeDuhn writes, 'what Skinner wants to avoid by holding on to authorial intention is the spiral towards "reader response", which leads ultimately to texts being subordinated to their modern interpreters rather than to the historical context of their production' (*ibid.*, 489). His second concern in holding on to intentional behaviour, BeDuhn argues, is to avoid reductionist readings of historical texts: 'Skinner also sees authorial intention as a bulwark against reductionistic analyses of texts as

“discursive practices”, an approach he fears wholly subordinates texts to context, and seems incapable of crediting texts with effecting change on their environment’ (*ibid.*). Although these points of concern are indeed relevant to historical studies of religious discourses, I remain unconvinced by Skinner’s incorporation of intentionality. The problems that arise from assuming intention or agency on the part of an actor are numerous. Further, I would argue that the ways in which discourses are formative and performed are more complex than can be accounted for with analyses of subjective intentions. Finally, when one brings gender into the frame of speech action, it becomes clear that locating agential speech is a tenuous process. It is precisely for these reasons that Judith Butler’s theories of performativity prove a necessary supplement to Skinner’s and BeDuhn’s speech act theories.

(i) *Judith Butler’s Theories of Performativity*

For the last several decades, feminist scholars have critiqued thoroughly the trope of the ‘stable, rational subject’. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir, feminist theorists have endeavoured to demonstrate the ways in which our subject positions materialise through social processes of relationality. Moreover, much crucial feminist theoretical work has been done to trace the genealogy of rationality. Scholars like Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Genevieve Lloyd (1993), Grace Jantzen (1998: 27-58), and Beverly Clack (1999) have traced the ways in which the binary mind/body has manifested throughout western thinking and how those various manifestations have been historically gendered such that man was aligned with mind, and woman with body. Not only did this serve to reserve the realm of intellectual, rational thought for male subjects, it also often marginalised embodiment within western intellectual processes. Skinner’s reliance upon the historical rational subject is problematic therefore insofar as it can only ever take into account one *type* of human experience and it cannot fully account for the ways in which speech acts may have bodily manifestations. If an historical analysis of a religious context is reliant upon the location of a ‘rational, speaking subject’ then projects like my own become almost impossible. Throughout much of early western history, women were neither considered thinking, rational beings nor were they

allowed 'to speak' in textual historical accounts. Tracing women's intentions, therefore, becomes exponentially trickier. When applying the lens of speech act theory to the hagiography of Angela of Foligno, for instance, whose intentions are we tracing? Those of Angela, who was literally prohibited from (textual) autonomous speech, or those of her male confessor? Could we ever really get to Angela's 'subjective intentions'? Here, I would echo BeDuhn who argues that, 'the question is whether the idea of a separate illocutionary act, involving intention, is recoverable apart from the illocutionary force. Getting to the force may be the end of the search' (2000: 491). Never mind that Angela's speech concerns 'mystical' experience of the divine; content, it seems, almost inconceivable to classify in modern philosophical terms of rationale (Jantzen 1995). Austin's classification of illocution seems much better suited to historical studies of religions wherein accessing intentional behaviour is complicated at best or untenable at worst. Aspects of social identification, like gender, class, or ethnicity cannot be subsumed under a universal subject position and must therefore be accounted for as part of the conditions that govern speech. Skinner's insistence upon contextual analysis is justifiable, however without an awareness of the ways in which gender informs historical contexts, resultant theorisations remain incomplete. Thus, for the purposes of my research, I find Judith Butler's theories of performativity a necessary supplement.

Similarly building on Austin's theories, Butler, by examining power, discursive production, performative gender, 'sex norms' and the materialisation of bodies, aims to investigate '[to] what extent 'sex' [is] a constrained production, a forcible effect, one which sets the limits to what will qualify as a body by regulating the terms by which bodies are and are not sustained' (1993: 23). Butler suggests that both 'the body' and 'bodies' are constructions 'that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender' (1999: 13). Bodies become discernible because of their mark of gender and are then formed according to that mark. We might think of Butler's assertions in terms of what occurs at the birth of a baby; someone exclaims 'it's a girl!' and there the body of a girl materialises or becomes intelligible. The formation of the girl is sedimented and reinforced by the social conventions surrounding 'girl': she is dressed in pink, given dolls, enrolled in ballet, etc. Performativity then, is not the ways in which one enacts one's subjectivity, rather it is the reiteration of

regulatory discourse. In a crude sense, performativity is what makes regulatory 'norms', stick. Butler asserts, 'performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names' (1999: 2). Performative gender, therefore, is itself a speech act—'it's a girl!'—whilst also forming some of the conditions in which utterances can be made. Thus, reading gender in this way better enables us to determine the *possibilities* for speech in a historical context based on the specific subject we are examining. This may, of course, sound precisely like the type of reductionism that Skinner is so concerned to guard against. Butler is no stranger to criticisms which argue against theorising the body in discursive terms, nor to scholars who might misread gender performativity as a choice one *donnes* like a garment (1993: x). She responds to these critiques by asserting that what need to change are our very notions of 'construction':

For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and violence; and these "facts," one might skeptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere construction. [...] [But] why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and dispensable character? What are we to make of constructions without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, those which have acquired for us a kind of necessity? Are certain constructions of the body constitutive in this sense: that we could not operate without them, that without them there would be no "I," no "we"? Thinking the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself. And if certain constructions appear constitutive, that is, have this character of being that "without which" we could not think at all, we might suggest that bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas.

(1993: xi)

Butler's answer negates the anxieties implicit in Skinner's objections to characterising texts as discursive; in emphasising the ways in which constructions are meaningful and fundamental to our ability to make sense of the world, Butler demonstrates the efficacy of her method. Far from stripping speech of the power to act, Butler's theories of performativity demonstrate the very rootedness of our subjectivities in discourse. Further, despite Butler's hesitance to define individual agency within the framework of discourses of power,⁶ her theories of performativity nevertheless allow for what Skinner and BeDuhn call 'infelicities'.

⁶ In fact, the most she will say is that 'agency is a vexed affair' (2006: 285).

BeDuhn begins the section on 'infelicities' by admitting that Skinner had very little, if anything to say about this particular element of Austin's original work. Austin placed infelicities in two categories: 'misfires' and 'abuses' (1975: 18-19). Misfires, BeDuhn writes, 'can be identified on the spot, because they involve a performance voided by non-adherence to the established conditions and procedures of a speech act' (2000: 496). Here again, an example might be the pronouncement, 'I now pronounce you man and wife' which becomes a misfire if made by someone (who according to convention), has no authority to legally or ritually perform weddings. BeDuhn argues that abuses, on the other hand, 'are rarely detectable in the performance; rather they are discovered, if at all, after the fact, when the person who made the performance reveals later by word or deed that it was insincere' (*ibid.*). For example, the bride, although she uttered the words 'I do', felt entirely insincere and filed 73 days later for an annulment. In both instances, Austin's definitions of 'infelicities' rely on an agential or intentional actor who openly defies conventions or who may privately defy them but who performs speech acts according to accepted norms. As BeDuhn implies, trying to locate and classify abuses is largely futile; historically analysing private intentions is rarely feasible. Misfires, I would argue, are equally as problematic in historical studies of religions. In early modern Christianity, for example, misfires involving improper invocations of liturgical texts could likely result in charges of heresy. Recorded instances of Christians performing misfires are relatively few given the possibility of the sometimes life-threatening ramifications. Austin's attempts to theorise infelicities seem to me an endeavour to account for the ways in which speech acts may have unintended and unpredicted results. It is not to say that individual historical actors *never* intentionally defied convention in their performances, but this is difficult to reconcile with the assertion that certain conditions determined what a subject could know and therefore limited the possibilities for speech. In other words, if we assert that certain conditions and conventions framed the possibilities for individual performance, then to suggest that a subject would summon utterances entirely outside of that framework is to contradict the initial premise. In light of this point of tension, I would suggest that Butler's understanding of reiteration is a constructive amelioration. Primarily, Butler suggests that the very fact that discursive norms or conventions must necessarily be cited and recited points towards the inherent

fragility of those discourses. She writes, '[indeed], it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law' (1993: 2). Further, Butler points towards the derivative nature of discursive conventions; each citation is in fact a recitation such that norms are copied performances of copied performances. In between each performance, Butler argues, gaps and slippages begin to form and the resultant performances are inherently different. A helpful metaphor of this process can be thought of in terms of film negatives: each time the negative is used to make prints, the quality of the negative degrades. Each printing therefore will materialise slightly differently from the one preceding it. In this way we may perceive changes or incongruities in speech acts which do not categorically defy conventions, and therefore do not contradict what we may know about orthodoxy. Nevertheless, these reiterated speech acts may indeed stretch the framework of possibilities for performance. This reading of differences, therefore, does not rely on untraceable intentions nor does it position our historical subjects entirely at odds with the conventions which defined their performances. Instead, theories of performativity allow us to read variations as elements inextricable to the formation of discourses. The problems with Butler's conclusions however, lie in her suggestions that within the gaps between performances, expressions of agency may be identified by the ways in which performances subvert the dominant discourse. Agency, for Butler, becomes entangled with subversive action to the extent that actions which appear to collude with dominant discursive norms cannot be characterised as agential. This point of tension in Butler's work is challenged by Saba Mahmood.

II. *Critically Questioning the Feminist Subject*

In her monograph *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood critically engages with Egyptian women's involvements in mosque movements in an effort to dislodge western academic feminist ideals of subjectivity from assumptions about secularism (2005). Mahmood both builds on and challenges Butler's notions of performativity, concluding ultimately that theorisations that posit subversion as the dichotomous

other to collusion are insufficient in accounting for all the ways in which women are both subject to—and occupants of—structures of power. Central to these critiques is Mahmood's assertion that feminist scholars must challenge their own assumptions about the supposed universality of the human desire for 'freedom' and further, that they must come to terms with the dynamism and complexity of desire itself. Mahmood outlines the ways in which western feminist scholars have typically described Muslim women as 'pawns in a grand patriarchal plan' on the one hand, or on the other, that their participation in Islam seems (at best), 'inimical to their "own interests and agendas"' (2005: 1-2). Fundamental to both of these arguments, Mahmood suggests, is the shared assumption 'that there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose the practices, values, and injunctions that the Islamist movement embodies' (*ibid.*, 2). Mahmood questions the validity of such an assumption: 'What is the history by which we have come to assume its truth? What kind of a political imagination would lead one to think in this manner?' (*ibid.*). In posing these types of questions, Mahmood seeks to destabilise the givenness of 'freedom' as the central value to which all women's desires are anchored. She suggests that in discarding this kind of assumption, feminist scholars might be able to begin asking questions that are not mired in the dilemma posed by 'women's active support for socioreligious movements that sustain principles of female subordination' (*ibid.*, 5). Ultimately then, Mahmood's project is not just an 'ethnographic account of the Islamic Revival'; it is also an attempt to challenge deeply embedded assumptions within western academic frameworks such that conceptions of human nature, self, and agency may be investigated even outside of 'normative liberal' frameworks (*ibid.*). Although my research differs markedly from Mahmood's in both content and method, a critical reading of her theorisations of desire, agency, and performativity through which I build on Mahmood's theories in order to construct my own unique theorisations of embodied agency, is nevertheless helpful for my own analysis of the ways in which fourteenth-century Florentine women participated in the making of religious art.

As will become evident throughout this thesis, *trecento* Florentine women, who were prohibited from participating in many parts of public life, made themselves and their desires visible through the commissioning and veneration of certain types of religious art. Thus, although this effort at visibility may appear to

provide feminist scholars with rich material to discuss Florentine women's subversion of dominant socioreligious discourses, it should be recalled that the subjects of women's commissions,⁷ and the systems within which women were able to generate art, were tied up with the very same discourses that necessitated their marginalisation. Women's commissions stretched the boundaries of orthodoxy insofar as they made themselves (and their bodies) visible in ways which did not always align seamlessly with discursive constructions of 'Woman'. However, it is nevertheless problematic to understand women's efforts in this respect as subversive or disruptive of religious discourses. In terms of her own research, Mahmood discusses the tensions inherent in researching women's participation within traditionally patriarchal contexts:

On the one hand, women are seen to assert their presence in previously male-defined spheres while, on the other hand, the very idioms they use to enter these arenas are grounded in discourses that have historically secured their subordination to male authority. In other words, women's subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life.

(2005:5-6)

For Florentine women, the virtues of chastity, modesty, charity, temperance and detachment were both the necessary conditions for their participation in the production of art, as well as the mechanisms by which they were, as suggested by Casagrande, kept in 'custody' (1992: 70-104). These prescribed virtues were intended to form models of behaviour that justified and perpetuated women's silence, invisibility, passivity, and marginalisation. Nevertheless, these virtues, when perceived (by men in power) as embodied by some women, were the license for women to participate in the commissioning of art; art that in many ways reinforced these virtues as integral to human—but especially to women's—salvation. That women's commissions reflect narratives of salvation is another key element in constructing an analysis which seeks to surpass the collusion/subversion binary. Although the content of all lay commissions, including women's, would have been framed by ecclesiastical orthodoxy,⁸ women's frequent choices to have themselves

⁷ Namely, soteriological themes such as Christ's Passion.

⁸ The discussion on the ways in which personal commissions were always already informed by institutional definitions of orthodoxy will be explored in Chapter Five of this thesis.

depicted as present at the Crucifixion, or as receiving Christ's body in deposition scenes suggests that women did not desire to distance themselves from discourses of salvation, but rather, that they were interested in being fully integrated within these narratives. Here again, Mahmood's work provides a constructive vocabulary for examining women's choices, or what many feminist scholars have described as women's agency.

Discussing previous feminist scholarship in the humanities, Mahmood asserts that central to these studies was the question, 'how do women contribute to reproducing their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it?' (*ibid.*, 6). Within studies of religious traditions in particular, Mahmood suggests that feminist scholars sought to analyse 'the conceptual and practical resources [religious traditions] offer to women, and the possibilities for redirecting and recoding these resources in accord with women's "own interests and agendas"—a recoding that stands as the site of women's agency' (*ibid.*). Although Mahmood emphasises the importance of feminist scholarship in locating women's agency, she is nonetheless concerned with questioning the assumptions embedded within traditional feminist definitions of autonomy. According to Mahmood, for scholars who understand agency 'as the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)', there is a tendency to rely upon 'resistance' as a universally meaningful category of human actions (*ibid.*, 9). She suggests that within certain feminist studies, there is a failure 'to problematize... the universality of desire—central for liberal and progressive thought, and presupposed by the concept of resistance it authorizes—to be free from relations of subordination and, for women, from structures of male domination' (*ibid.*, 10).⁹ While demands for women's freedom and autonomy have indeed proven politically profound, Mahmood nevertheless insists that within scholarship, women's agency must be divorced 'from the goals of progressive politics' so that the various 'dimensions of human action whose ethical and political

⁹ Furthermore, Mahmood suggests that far from being an oversight by feminist scholars, this failure to problematise 'the universality of desire to be free from relations of subordination' is intrinsic to western feminism as a result of 'its dual character as both an *analytical* and a *politically prescriptive* project' (2005: 10). The element of Mahmood's argument that is most relevant to my project is the recognition that 'the feminist subject'—one who actively desires freedom—is contextually and temporally specific to western feminist intellectual movements.

status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance' become visible (*ibid.*, 14). Feminist scholars have sought to deconstruct static, monolithic categories of gender, race, sexuality and class and yet the historical construction of the autonomous, 'resistant' agent has largely remained invisible in their studies of women's experiences. Mahmood writes:

If we recognize that the desire for freedom from, or subversion of, norms is not an innate desire that motivates all beings at all times, but is also profoundly mediated by cultural and historical conditions, then the question arises: how do we analyze operations of power that construct different kinds of bodies, knowledges, and subjectivities whose trajectories do not follow the entelechy of liberatory politics?

(2005: 14)

If scholars seek to examine the historical and cultural specificities of women's experiences, then, Mahmood asserts, 'the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance' (*ibid.*). Desire for freedom, individual or collective, cannot be assumed in an analysis of the historical instantiations of women's expressivity and further, where it is present, it cannot be understood without knowing the mechanisms of oppression within which that desire materialised.¹⁰ Thus, the task of identifying agency must always be localised and contingent upon the structures of its formation. Within historical and cultural contexts where hegemonic discourses have resulted in conditions of exclusion, subordination and marginalisation, it is not unreasonable to imagine agential desire for inclusion, visibility and normality. Behaviours, therefore, that seem to encourage further subordination may be, in fact, a type of agency; one which seeks to occupy a 'normative' subject position. As Mahmood indicates, '[in] this sense, agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one *inhabits* norms' (*ibid.*, 15).

Regarding feminist scholarship of medieval and early modern women's agency in particular, even a brief survey reveals the legitimacy of Mahmood's line of critique.¹¹ In Chapter Six of this thesis, I refer to the work of Kimberly LoPrete

¹⁰ See Hewitt 1995 for a similar argument.

¹¹ I further address these problems in some types of feminist scholarship in Chapter Six of this thesis; specifically, I offer a constructive critique of works by Cordelia Warr and Catherine King that rely upon assumptions of women's agency as necessarily subversive of patriarchal discourses.

whose essay on women as viragos appears in an edited volume (which is one of a series) entitled *Victims or Viragos?* (2005). The previous book in the series was titled *Pawns or Players?* (2003). Although the essays within these volumes often attempt to provide nuanced analyses of early modern and medieval women's lives, the titles highlight the problematic binary frameworks within which much scholarship on early modern women has been conducted. Anne Clark examines the relationship between Elisabeth and Ekbart of Schönaue and asks whether the resultant texts were representative of 'Repression or Collaboration' (1996: 151-165). She proposes a reading of Elisabeth's visions that '[allows] for the possibility of a certain disruption of the ordered ranks of hierarchy'; she substantiates this as a possibility because of the 'many striking examples in late medieval spiritual writings that evoke a subversion of gender hierarchy' (1996: 151). In the collected volume *Beyond Isabella*, Roger Crum presents an essay entitled 'Controlling Women or Women Controlled? Suggestions for Gender Roles and Visual Culture in the Italian Renaissance Palace' (2001: 37-50). Cynthia Lawrence, in describing 'the patronage of women in the early modern period', suggests that 'in many cases...commissions by female patrons appear to intentionally subvert or reinvent traditional categories in order to achieve a more personal statement' (1997: 10). In all of these examples, women's agency is framed (immediately in the title, in most instances) as either subversive of, or collusive with dominant religious discourses. Even when scholars attempt to interpret these historical case studies through a sort of 'middle way', their language often creeps back into the realm of women's agency as subversion. Elaine Rosenthal's essay, 'The Position of Women in Renaissance Florence: neither Autonomy nor Subjection', seems a promising departure from this type of binarised interpretation but her conclusions, I would suggest, tend towards women as colluders. By analysing (only) texts written by elite men in Florence, Rosenthal comes to the conclusion that men loved and respected 'their women' and that the oscillating circumstances of women's lives ('between freedoms and restrictions, from helplessness...to comparative independence') was a result of the mutual 'confidence, trust and, indeed, love and respect' between men and women (1988: 377-378). It is difficult, in light of Rosenthal's word choice and her choice to draw on such a limited set of resources (i.e. only elite men's textual interpretations of women's experiences), to come to any other conclusion but that women willingly

underwent such volatile conditions out of love and for the good of the family. It is not to suggest that *trecento* Florentine women didn't feel love and respect for their families, it is very likely that many of them did. Rather, the primary problem with Rosenthal's conclusions is that women's agency is defined entirely in terms of men's interpretations of women and of women's experiences. It is almost as if Rosenthal is suggesting that women's own unique desires do not exist separately from what *trecento* men dictated them to be. Further, there is little recognition on Rosenthal's part of the ways in which dominant discourses mandated women's exclusion, marginalisation and subordination; she seems interested only in the rare instances wherein elite women were able to act independently and these occurrences she chalks up to men's love for 'their women'. Ultimately, Rosenthal's analysis, although it purports to be about women's positionality, is actually about men; it relies on men's accounts, it conflates women's unique desires (whatever those might be) with those of their fathers, husbands, guardians, etc., and the explanation given for the rare cases of women's independence and 'freedom' is men's love and respect. In all of these studies, the conclusions reached about women's embodied experiences, and women's expressions of agency are frequently contradictory. On the one hand, some scholars attempt to argue that early modern women deliberately tried to disrupt or subvert dominant religious discourses; these assertions are made in spite of earlier recognitions that (1) discourse is not so easily manipulated and (2) that any attempts to invert Christian norms could likely result in dangerous charges of heresy. On the other hand, scholars like Rosenthal fail to take seriously the ways in which dominant religious discourses brought about damaging conditions for women such that the manner in which women could perform their spiritual embodiments was characterised as marginal and subordinate. As a result, conclusions about 'love and respect' seem strangely at odds with the frequently harmful material conditions in which women expressed their agency; in these accounts, women's actions seem strangely masochistic.¹² Therefore, building on Mahmood's arguments for conceptualising women's agency in ways that are divorced from the dichotomy of subversion or collusion, I endeavour to conduct a different reading of *trecento*

¹² I cannot rule out the possibility that psychological states (such as those we might currently classify as masochistic) motivated fourteenth-century Florentine women. Nonetheless, I would suggest that it is insufficient to characterise all women's actions as being the result of 'masochism', for instance.

Florentine women's expressions of embodied agency. Specifically, I suggest that certain trends in *trecento* Florentine women's commissions of religious art point towards their desires to inhabit 'normative' positions within the very discursive structures which required their marginalization and abasement. These desires to occupy 'normative' subject positions were formed and informed by soteriological discourses which both necessitated women's embodiment to be presented *a priori* as damaged and enabled women to act on their desires for salvation through the making and worship of religious art. Mahmood suggests the following:

If we accept the notion that all forms of desire are discursively organized (as much of recent feminist scholarship has argued), then it is important to interrogate the practical and conceptual conditions under which different forms of desire emerge, including desire for submission to recognized authority. We cannot treat as natural and imitable only those desires that ensure the emergence of feminist politics.

(2005: 15)

Although *trecento* Florentine women's desires for salvation were not liberatory, they nevertheless inspired behaviours that pushed against, and thus expanded, the boundaries of orthodoxy.

The final tool in completing the theoretical framework surrounding women's participation in the commissioning of religious art—one that seeks to avoid the suppression/subversion binary—is Mahmood's reading of Butler. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that Butler's theories of performativity, derived from a Foucauldian assessment of the functional role of discourse, are effective tools for an analysis of the ways in which discourses materialise embodied subjectivity. Mahmood concurs and suggests, moreover, that Butler builds on Foucault in two important ways: one, power, which permeates various aspects of life, is inherently productive of desires, objects of knowledge, etc. (2005: 17). Second, the very processes of power that subordinate a subject are also the means by which she may form an identity and act with agency (*ibid.*). Further, with specific reference to sex and gender, Mahmood describes Butler's assertion that 'there is no representational sex (or material body) that is not already constituted by the system of gender representation, but also that gender discourse is *itself* constitutive of materialities it refers to (and is in this sense not purely representational)' (*ibid.*, 18). Butler not only relies on the work of Foucault, but also builds on analyses of language systems—

particularly that of J.L. Austin—to argue that discourse is performative; that is, ‘that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains’ (Butler 1993: 2). Mahmood suggests that ‘in contrast to a long tradition of feminist scholarship that treated norms as an external social imposition that constrain the individual, Butler forces us to rethink this external-internal opposition by arguing that social norms are the necessary ground through which the subject is realized and comes to enact her agency’ (2005: 19). Finally, in Mahmood’s synthesis of Butler, the formation of the subject relies on ‘certain exclusionary operations’:

[Butler] argues that the subject is produced simultaneously through a necessary repudiation of identities, forms of subjectivities, and discursive logics, what she calls “a constitutive outside to the subject” (Butler 1993, 3), which marks the realm of all that is unspeakable, unsignifiable, and unintelligible from the purview of the subject, but remains, nonetheless, necessary to the subject’s self-understanding and formulation.

(*ibid.*)

The ways in which Butler’s theorisations are constructive to Mahmood’s project parallel their utility in my own research. More specifically, Mahmood values Butler’s avoidance of an ‘emancipatory model of agency’,¹³ inasmuch as she ‘locates the possibility of agency within structures of power (rather than outside of it) and, more importantly, suggests that the reiterative structure of norms serves not only to *consolidate* a particular regime of discourse/power but also provides the means for *destabilization*’ (2005: 20). In other words, Butler conceives of structures of power as formative and in their necessary reiteration, they produce possibility. Further, her insistence that the ‘undoing’ of norms is always already tied up with the ‘doing’ of them leads Mahmood to argue that ‘the logic of subversion and resignification cannot be predetermined in Butler’s framework’ (*ibid.*). Structures of power are thus, in Mahmood’s reading of Butler, productive of agency in ways which are complex, diverse, contingent, fragile and unpredictable. For a project concerned with exploring various possibilities for subject formation within normative power structures (such as Mahmood’s), Butler’s theories of performativity offer promising ways of reading.

¹³ Mahmood clarifies that this type of model is precisely that which she criticises: ‘one that presumes that all humans qua humans are “endowed with a will, freedom, and intentionality” whose workings are “thwarted by relations of power that are considered external to the subject”’ (Mahmood 2005: 20).

According to Mahmood, in spite of the potential of Butler's work, her application of theories of performativity nevertheless lapse into a consolidation/subversion binary. 'One key tension in Butler's work', Mahmood writes, 'owes to the fact that while she emphasizes the ineluctable relationship between the consolidation and destabilization of norms, her discussion of agency tends to focus on those operations of power that resignify and subvert norms' (2005: 21). For Mahmood then, Butler's theories must be pushed past the point at which Butler herself applies them; or, put differently, they must be made to perform in ways which more closely resemble Butler's initially stated aims.¹⁴ Reading 'the power of norms' in ways that are limited to frameworks of suppression and subversion have, as Mahmood states, consequences that impoverish our understanding of the various functions of power:

An important consequence of these aspects of Butler's work (and its reception) is that her analysis of the power of norms remains grounded in an agonistic framework, one in which norms suppress and/or are subverted, are reiterated and/or resignified—so that one gets little sense of the work norms perform beyond this register of suppression and subversion within the constitution of the subject.

(2005: 22)

Mahmood suggests that an analysis of normative structures, and the ways in which they form agential subjects, must critically engage not only with moments of consolidation or destabilisation but also with the various ways norms are inhabited.¹⁵ Mahmood points to the fact that this assertion is not contrary to Butler's own beliefs about the 'subjectivating power of norms', even if her work results in the privileging of moments of subversion. Building on Mahmood's argument, I suggest that Butler's own recognition of the important ways embodied subjects inhabit norms (rather than subvert them) can be understood in her stated aims for *Bodies*

¹⁴ Mahmood emphasises this tension by highlighting Butler's cautionary premises: 'she admonishes the reader that agency should not be conceptualized as "always and only opposed to power"' (2005: 21, n. 37). According to Mahmood, this prescriptive stands in opposition to Butler's later discussions of agency wherein she equates 'agency and the ability of performatives to oppose normative structures' (*ibid.*).

¹⁵ Mahmood clarifies the ways that she both expands upon, and moves beyond Butler's work: 'I would like to expand Butler's insight that norms are not simply a social imposition on the subject but constitute the very substance of her intimate, valorized interiority. But in doing so, I want to move away from an agonistic and dualistic framework—one in which norms are conceptualized on the model of doing and undoing, consolidation and subversion' (2005: 23).

That Matter. Discussing subject formation, Butler argues that processes of exclusion are integral to forming ‘the speaking “I”’ (1993: xiii). The bodily norms—in Butler’s case, these refer to ‘normative phantasm[s] of “sex”’—necessarily inhabited by a subject are produced simultaneously with ‘a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subjects,” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject’ (*ibid.*).¹⁶ Although those bodies that are least proximate to the norm, and therefore outside of what is intelligible as a subject, are cast repeatedly as abject, as Other, their relationship with the normative subject is inextricable and necessary. Butler asserts that whilst the presence of the abject may appear to threaten and disrupt the normativity of the subject, the task at hand for the concerned scholar is to consider this disruption not as a ‘failure’ of subject formation, but rather, as a ‘critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility’ (*ibid.*). It seems as though what is crucial here is not necessarily the subversion of norms, but rather the investigation of those norms such that the experiences of those in ‘uninhabitable zones of social life’ may be included in a rearticulation of legitimacy. Certainly then, the agency of a subject may be considered as the ways in which the subject navigates the porous, fragile boundaries of the ‘unlivable’ in order to inhabit and experience a ‘livable’, ‘legible’ position within social life. This type of action could not be considered a subversion since the very sign the ‘not yet’-subject desires to inhabit is the one produced by the normative system. Indeed, this type of agential action would enact change—insofar as the boundaries of intelligibility are stretched—but in certain situations, this would not mean disestablishment of normative power structures. As Mahmood suggests, investigating agency in these terms would not necessarily mean locating only moments of subversion or suppression, but rather, ‘think[ing] about the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated’ (2005: 23). Further, her theorisation enables the development of a framework wherein agency means pursuing and acting upon one’s desires, even when they are subject to, and compliant with, normative systems.

¹⁶ Butler defines the abject as ‘those “unlivable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject’ (1993: xiii).

In analysing *trecento* Florentine women's participation in the commissioning and reverence of certain types of religious art, my work relies both on Butler's theories of performativity, as well as on Mahmood's explorations of agency. For middle- and upper-class women, virtues like chastity, temperance, passivity and charity were promoted as the foundations of the ideal mode of female embodiment and further, as keys to salvation. For women of lower statuses, who were categorised as incapable of virtue, they 'were doubly doomed to social marginalization and a sinful life' (Casagrande 1992: 75). In either case, women were held up against 'predetermined categories' or models of 'Woman' and only those women who most closely resembled orthodox discursive models—like the Virgin Mary, for instance—were conceived of as 'salvageable'. Florentine discourses of salvation in the *trecento* were paradoxical at best. On the one hand, as members of humanity, and therefore created in God's image, women were as deserving of salvation as men. On the other hand however, ecclesiastical associations of women with Eve, compounded with renewed interests in classical Greek and Roman texts that baldly equated women with materiality, aberration and corruption, erected soteriological discourses which positioned women further from the normative ideal (i.e. the Resurrected Christ). Women's (inevitable) failure to approximate the normative ideals established both for humankind more generally, and for women in particular, engendered social circumstances in which women were marginalised, disenfranchised, and made subordinate. In short, women were denied normative subject positions within *trecento* Florence. What becomes visible in women's participation in the generation of religious art, is their *desire* to approximate and inhabit a normative subject position such that salvation is truly attainable. Although some women's commissions quite literally made their embodiment more visible within *trecento* religious life in Florence—and therefore changed the conditions generated by soteriological discourses—the themes of the artworks confirm and uphold ecclesiastical narratives. The focus of women's desires was not to escape or overturn religious discourses, but rather to occupy a position within them. Soteriological discourses cannot, therefore, be conceived of as purely liberatory or empowering because it was precisely these normative systems which engendered damaging modes of embodiment for women. Nevertheless, women's attempts at adherence to discursive ideals were also what secured their commissions of

religious art, and therefore provided them with opportunities to act as agents in achieving their own salvation. These opportunities were, however, usually reserved for women only after their death, again throwing into question the extent to which one could read these art works as reversing the material effects of soteriological discourses. The remainder of this thesis will, therefore, further critique the discursive systems which lead to damaging embodiment for women and which limited their participation in religious life. It will also examine several examples of women's commissions in order to explore the ways women attempted to express their desires for salvation, the ways they navigated the fragile boundaries between 'liveable' and 'unliveable' (even in their deaths), and the ways *trecento* Florentine women stretched the boundaries of orthodoxy such that they became visible and capable of salvation. I will begin this analysis in the next chapter by first providing the contextual framework within which these processes of embodied formation and performance unfolded.

CHAPTER TWO

TRECENTO FLORENCE

The late fourteenth century has proven to be an intriguing phase in western history for many scholars. Two of the most well-known historians to analyse the period were Jacob Burckhardt (d. 1897) and Johan Huizinga (d. 1945). According to Burckhardt, the last years of the fourteenth century marked the dawn of the 'Renaissance', a time period of burgeoning individualism, self-consciousness, gender neutrality, and above all, the coming of the liberated 'Renaissance Man'.¹ For Huizinga, the conclusion of the *trecento* was marked by 'the violent tenor of life' which manifested in sharp polarities of 'suffering and joy' (2010: 1). Huizinga believed that the time period he characterised as 'the waning of the Middle Ages' was one in which death and calamity were more deeply felt and honours and riches were more avidly relished; above all else, the fourteenth century was dominated by the church which filled the air 'ceaselessly' with sounds of worship (*ibid.*, 1-2). In Huizinga's fourteenth century, there were only stark contrasts. In both of these histories, the *trecento* becomes a caricature; either of a bold, secular 'Renaissance', or a volatile, deeply pious 'Middle Ages'. Neither historical rendition, however, sufficiently demonstrates the complexity and dynamism of *trecento* Florence.² The purpose of this chapter is thus not to provide an exhaustive historical survey of fourteenth-century Florence, nor to suggest a more appropriate thematic summary of the last half of the century. Rather, it is my intention to lay the historical contextual framework within which a critical investigation of gendered, religious embodiment may be conducted. I will begin with a brief examination of the legacy of the thirteenth century in Florence. During the *duecento*, factional violence and familial feuding created a tumultuous environment that led to the prohibition of elites from holding positions of civic authority which had an important impact on

¹ On individualism and self-consciousness, see Burckhardt 1990: 98-110; 198-225; on gender neutrality, *ibid.*, 250-252; and concerning the liberated, 'Renaissance Man', *ibid.*, 271-344.

² For an overview of the problems in Burckhardt's and Huizinga's works, see Burke 2008: 20-29. For scholarly critiques of Burckhardt and Huizinga, see Porter 1997. For gender critical approaches to Burckhardt's work, see Travitsky 1981; Ferguson, Quilligan, and Vickers 1986: xv-xvi; and Schiesari 1989: 68-69.

the mobility of the wealthy merchant classes who, by the *trecento*, dominated the civic hierarchy. I next provide a contextual overview of fourteenth-century Florence, focusing specifically on the latter half of the century and dealing with political and economic activity, family, education and the arts. The second half of the chapter focuses specifically on the religious environment in *trecento* Florence, including a broad examination of ecclesiastical structures, the place of the mendicants, and lay piety.

I. A Historical Overview

At the beginning of thirteenth century, Florence—like many other city-states—still existed as a feudal state controlled largely by noble families. Characteristic of a culture informed by courtly love,³ Florence was dominated by knighthood structures and almost constantly embroiled in factional conflict. Torn not only by individual family disputes, the city and *contado* of Florence were also divided by loyalties to either the Holy Roman Emperor—the Ghibellines—or to the papacy, citizens identified as Guelfs (Compagni 1986: 6).⁴ These factions, prevalent amongst the elite,⁵ had an enormous impact on the domain of Florence as a whole. Property was frequently destroyed both in the city and throughout the *contado* as various bastions of control were gained (and reversed), and murders were carried out in vindictive cycles. So pervasive was the violence and conflict amongst the elite throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that, as Najemy asserts '[each] conflict built on earlier antagonisms, and the search for a precise moment of origin is necessarily futile' (2008: 20). Although the elite families fought in order to win clients and

³ See Kelly 1984: 19-50 for an outline of courtly love in thirteenth-century Europe.

⁴ See also Najemy 2008: 5-27, 88-95; Finiello Zervas 1988. Dino Compagni begins his chronicle of Florence by lamenting the Guelf-Ghibelline conflict, '[after] many ancient evils resulting from the strife of its citizens, there arose in this city a new evil which divided all of its citizens in such a way that the two factions called themselves enemies under two new names, that is, Guelf and Ghibelline' (1986: 6).

⁵ I replicate Najemy's use of this term, his reasoning being that: 'Florentines typically called these powerful families the "grandi," whose literal translation as the "great" is clumsy and potentially misleading. Since "grandi" were not a legally defined order with titles, "nobility" would be even more misleading, and "aristocracy," apart from implying judgments that may be unwarranted, suggests long-term hegemony that cannot account for the mobility and conflict within Florence's volatile class structure. Thus I use "elite" as the best, but not perfect, English equivalent' (2008: 5-6).

followers, their feuding actually resulted in driving away the *popolo*,⁶ a split that would cost elite families dearly as the thirteenth century progressed (Najemy 2008: 25-27). The growth and expansion of the Florentine economy further contributed to the decline of elite dominance, however.

As commerce increased, a new class of successful craftsmen, artisans, and merchants began to gain prominence. The rise of mercantilism not only increased Florence's growth, and its rising prominence in northern Italy, it also enabled the *popolo* to assert themselves in political and civic affairs. In September of 1250, following another particularly destructive conflict between the Guelf and Ghibelline families in the city, crowds gathered in the streets of Florence, demanding a government free of factionalism; on October 20, 1250, the *primo popolo* was born (Najemy 2008: 66). Lasting only ten years, the first 'popular' government was at least effective in circumscribing elite power; not only were knights excluded from the newly-formed neighbourhood militia companies (charged with keeping peace in the city), but the committee of elders, the *Anziani*, which made up the chief magistracy, was compiled of equal numbers of Guelfs and Ghibellines and was populated almost entirely with 'new men'.⁷ This first attempt to secure the city against the wars waged both internally, and against neighbouring factions in places like Pisa and Siena, was eventually overcome. As Guelf and Ghibelline fighting continued, further measures were adopted to exclude them from the civic involvement. Additionally, members of the *popolo* began to form professional guilds for protection against the ever-present volatility of the elite. In January 1293, *popolo* leaders took another bold step against the elite dominance by drafting the Ordinances of Justice. According to Najemy, the Ordinances, achieved two important things: 'they 1) created a formal federation among the guilds and placed the executive branch of Florentine government in its hands, and 2) codified and expanded existing anti-magnate legislation, subjecting ...140 lineages of the city and

⁶ The term *popolo*, Najemy writes, 'sometimes means all Florentines, or all those eligible to participate in political life. But it more often referred to non-elite citizens, sometimes including the laboring classes of artisans and salaried workers...but most often signifying the non-elite middle classes, thus evoking the "populus" of the ancient Roman republic' (Najemy 2008: 35). See also Bornstein 1986: xv.

⁷ This term denotes non-elite members of the *popolo* whose families were associated with professions like banking, trade, and the legal profession. Although many of these men became prominent through wealth and involvement in the government, they are often distinguished in historical literature from the elite. See Najemy 2008: 35-39.

contado to tougher applications of the obligation to provide surety and harsher penalties for crimes against non-magnates' (2008: 82-83).

Despite putting in place changes that would inform Florence's civic landscape through the next century, the second popular government also fell to the elite and civil war soon erupted. Though the city had exiled most Ghibelline leaders (both proclaimed and accused), a rift appeared amongst the Guelf magnate families resulting in the Black and White Guelfs. Building on patronage relationships with clients from the *popolo*, both Black and White Guelfs began to amass followers of magnate and non-magnate families alike. As the thirteenth century drew to a close, violence between the Black and White Guelfs and their supporters escalated, opening the fourteenth century with a public confrontation in June 1300 (Najemy 2008: 88-91). After a few attempts to resolve the conflict, Black leaders finally took control 8 November 1301 (*ibid.*, 92). Further rifts erupted within the Black Guelfs themselves and the party's in-fighting almost destroyed Florence entirely. In June 1304, confrontation once again erupted between opposing Black Guelfs. In an attempt to oust the leaders of one faction, a fire was set in the city centre. Caught by a strong wind, it swept through Florence destroying countless palaces, towers, houses and shops (*ibid.*, 93). Although this devastation marked the final decline of Florentine magnate family rule, they did not disappear from dominance until almost a decade later, when the leaders of the most prominent factions died, most of them from acts of retribution. The tumult at the end of the thirteenth century not only altered the physical face of Florence, it also set in motion new discourses of power which moved away from the feudal models which had proved so costly. A city brought to its knees by civil war, fire, and plague, Florence moved into the *trecento* hoping to leave behind the chaos which marked its past, as well as to meet the new demands of rapidly increasing wealth and population growth. Despite persistent discomfort between dominant political authorities and the *popolo*, new demands for representation began to surface in *trecento* Florence. Economic circumstances grew more complex both on a local level, and internationally. Florence's population throughout the *trecento* was almost constantly in flux owing to both growth from immigration and decimation from waves of plague. A rise in lay religious activity also began, straining Florence's relationship with ecclesiastical authorities. The violent legacy of the thirteenth century did not dissolve at the dawn of the

fourteenth century, but new grids of cultural and political discourses hinted at a fundamentally different city; one in which violence and chaos were always in tension with—and in relation to—growth and creation.

(i) *Landscape*

The domain of Florence in the *trecento* consisted of the city itself, the *contado* (the rural environs of the city) and the *distretto* (those areas beyond the *contado* but under the commune's control) (Brucker 1969: 5). By 1300, Najemy observes:

[It] extended roughly twenty-five miles north (to Barberino and Borgo San Lorenzo in the Mugello valley and beyond to Scarperia), a similar distance northeast (to Dicomano), fifteen miles southeast (including the upper Arno valley to Montevarchi), twenty-five miles southwest (to Castel fiorentino, Certaldo, and Poggibonsi in the Valdelsa), twenty miles down the lower Arno valley (to Empoli), but only some ten miles west by northwest (just beyond Signa and Campi).

(2008: 97)

During the course of the previous century, Florence had expanded its city walls three times in order to accommodate the increasing population from the *contado*. The last set of walls, begun in 1284, was completed by 1334, enclosed an area eight times that of the original walls. Najemy notes that after their completion, Florence and its *contado* was 'more densely populated than they would be for the next four centuries' (2008: 99-100).⁸ The physical structure of the city itself similarly underwent marked changes: street improvements and plaza constructions were numerous, most notably the rebuilding of Via S. Gallo in the 1320s, and the square of the Piazza della Signoria in 1330 (Brucker 1969: 28-31). Larger projects, like the work surrounding the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, and the completion of S. Maria Novella and S. Croce, took place throughout the early decades of the fourteenth century (*ibid.*, 25).

Changes to the habitable spaces within the walls of Florence were similarly dynamic in the *trecento*. Wealthy Florentines began incorporating new architectural

⁸ Zorzi also notes the staggering population increase: 'Florence... with probably about 15,000-20,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the thirteenth century, quintupled in size over the next one hundred years, [...] With more than 100,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Florence was one of the largest cities in the European West' (2000: 9).

features to their homes and as Brucker notes '[a] distinctive feature of these houses was the covered balcony or terrace on the top floor, which opened out onto the street and permitted inhabitants to escape from the gloomy interiors' (1969: 13). As the century progressed, other styles of domestic architecture were introduced to the elite palaces including *loggia* (covered porch), courtyards, and floor plans that enabled multiple families to inhabit the same palazzo.⁹ Brucker states that although feudal familial disputes lessened over the course of the century, the neighbourhoods, or *gonfalon*i of Florence retained ancestral organisation:

Each prominent family was closely identified with a particular neighbourhood, where the first urban generation had settled—its members banding together for protection—in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By 1400, the danger of physical attack from a rival house or faction was less real, but the pressures to remain in the ancestral neighbourhood was very strong.

(*ibid.*, 23)

The homes of artisans and craftsmen were more modest, often only two or three stories, with one room per storey and in some instances, simply single-room cottages. The continued influx of artisans, workers, and religious communities diversified the *gonfalon*i so that, according to Brucker, '[each] district was a melange of palace cottage, of cloth factory and retail shop, of parish church and monastic foundation' (*ibid.*). Though the *palazzi* and the mendicant cathedrals dominated, and in some ways defined the neighbourhoods of Florence, the urban expansion kept the cityscape heterogeneous.¹⁰

As mentioned previously the face of the *contado* also changed during the 1300's as the population moved increasingly towards the city to escape territorial wars. Further, as the focus of the commune's wealth shifted more in the direction of commerce, patronage became scarcer in the outlying areas (Najemy 2008: 96-100). The distinction between city and *contado* was porous, emphasised at the beginning of the century when a petition to the commune resulted in the construction of a road leading from within the city walls into the *contado*. According to Najemy, this was justified for two reasons: 'first, to ensure the importation of adequate food

⁹ Brucker writes that '[each] floor contained the full complement of rooms required for a household, for among the Florentine upper classes, it was common practice for fathers and married sons to live under the same roof' (1969: 13).

¹⁰ Structures—both domestic and civic—were increasingly built of stone in order to prevent the devastation that resulted from fires like the one in 1304 (Brucker 1969: 25). See also Goldthwaite 1980.

supplies'¹¹ and further, to enable militias of the *contado* to reach the city-centre in the instance of violent factional outbreaks (2008: 30-31). Thus, even for the citizens who remained outside the city walls, the commune's growth during the *trecento* brought the social behaviours and culture of the city to the fore. The *distretto* similarly became a reflection of the changing demands of the commune. Despite its small beginnings, and seemingly disadvantaged geographical location, Florence developed one of the most powerful domains in western Europe during the fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries. Through a series of alliances, and a consistent defence policy, Florence, in the early *trecento*, established what Zorzi calls 'the foundations for later political hegemony' (2000: 11). As wealth began to grow, and mercantile ventures supplemented the strength of the Florentine commune's economic reach, competition with surrounding communes increased. From the first few decades, to the end of the papal war in 1378, Florence embarked upon a series of 'politico-military competitions' that drastically changed the composition of its *distretto* (*ibid.*, 12). During this period of expansion, acquisition, and negotiation, Florence was so successful in building its *distretto* that by the fourth decade of the *trecento*, Zorzi states, 'Florence alone accounted for one-tenth' of the approximately 1 million Tuscan inhabitants (*ibid.*, 9).

Human activity was of course not the only force behind the physical changes Florence underwent in the *trecento*. The fire of 1304 was not an isolated event; while houses and city structures were still made of wood, and other insubstantial materials, fire periodically swept various sections of Florence (Brucker 1969: 25). The city's location on the Arno river also proved frequently disastrous: the flood of 1333 barrelled through the city taking the Ponte Vecchio with it. The Arno was also partially responsible for Florence's rise to prominence in the wool industry: the ready supply of water helped to streamline the processing and dyeing, increasing efficiency and production of textiles (Goldthwaite 1980: 31). The event that unquestionably altered the human landscape was the Black Death of 1348. Like the fires, or floods from the Arno, the plague was a regular visitor to most Tuscan communes during the early modern period. The Black Death, however, had an unprecedented impact, wiping out a record proportion of Florence's population. Goldthwaite writes that '[the] plagues of 1340 and 1348 had reduced Florence's

¹¹ See also Brucker 1969: 5.

population by one-half, and only part of this loss, perhaps one-third, was recovered in the second half of the century' (*ibid.*, 26). Bringing government activity and building to a halt, the Black Death had an impact which was felt at every level of Florentine society, that lingered for generations to come (Najemy 2008: 145).

Any survey of *trecento* Florence must take the land, the city structure, and the changing population into account not just for reasons of accuracy but also because the space in and around Florence, its physicality, is itself a character in the historical narrative. The dynamism and at times chaos of Florence—city, *contado* and *distretto*—was integral to the human activity within it; further, the physical space of Florence was figured and refigured because of the people who occupied the land, the architectural structures, and the farms (Crum and Paoletti 2006: 6). Alongside the religious and social discourses that shaped the lives of *trecento* Florentines, the landscape of Florence also functioned to affect their experiences, particularly in respect of the formation and performance of women's religious embodiment in the late fourteenth-century. The restriction of space was actively employed to delimit women, and yet the rapid changes in the Florentine landscape (i.e. the rise of the mendicant orders, the proliferation of nunneries, and the Black Death) also produced elements of elasticity.

(ii) *Political and Economic Turmoil in the Late Fourteenth Century*

Florentine law forbade women from holding political or public office, and indeed their physical presence in the *piazzi* where the most important offices were located (Tomas 2006: 312-313). Further, the very skills required to take part in civic life were overwhelmingly denied to women.¹² Thus, any discussion of the structure of the government or the dynamics of Florentine politics in the *trecento* assumes the actors to be male, even despite the effects of these structures being felt by both men and women. A detailed analysis of women's situatedness in civic life in Florence will unfold in the following section, and although I will include women wherever

¹² Though documentation of the *trecento* suggests middle-class and elite children of both sexes received primary-school education, only boys went on to be trained in either rhetoric, law, or business, or received apprenticeships in banking, or mercantilism (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 108-109).

possible in the remainder of the present discussion it is necessary to emphasise the ways in which the political, economic, and civic hierarchies of Florence were devoid of female participation at administrative levels.¹³

During the late thirteenth, and early fourteenth centuries, Florence began to rise to dominance in Tuscany because of both military endeavours and fiscal success. Any discussion of the political structures of Florence is also necessarily a look at the city's economy as the strength of the latter often determined the leaders of the former. As the thirteenth century came to a close, many Tuscan city-states developed political structures ruled by single *signoria*, as was the case of Verona, or the Duchy in Milan. Despite the prominence of several elite families in Florence, the political structure of the city did not rely upon a single ruler or family. Rather, the commune of Florence was composed of elected magistrates,¹⁴ military and justice officials,¹⁵ legislative councils, guild consuls, as part of the *Mercanzia*.¹⁶ These structures drew participation from a relatively large number of families, although eligibility for office was restricted to the middle classes and higher. Despite on-going

¹³ This assertion is also true in regards to Florentines of the lower classes, the poor, and to some extent, the inhabitants of the *contado*. Not only was political participation restricted to men identified as citizens but a disparity in the availability of historical documentation also significantly narrows the scope of fourteenth-century history. Although we have contracts and guild charters which may reflect the composition of membership in guilds, and illuminate the place of guilds within the structure of society, what we know about the experiences, thoughts, convictions, and personal relationships of the laboring classes at the bottom strata of guilds is virtually nothing. Similarly, as a result of records kept by religious institutions, we can reflect upon the place of the poor within the Florentine landscape; as a result of the *catasto* in 1427, we can survey demographic data of the *contado*, but the information available about the familial exchanges and rituals of these Florentines, or of the lower-class families within the city is absent. Gender roles within the family would be formed fundamentally differently when women's labor was a necessity for survival. The lack of data to support such a study (i.e. *ricordanze*, personal letters, memoirs, etc.) is due in part to levels of literacy amongst the lower-classes, but also to the values of the dominant classes, and equally the unquestioning acceptance of those values by subsequent historians, which marginalised the lower-classes.

¹⁴ Najemy explains that this was the office of the elders who 'ran day-to-day affairs of government and had broad judicial, financial, and administrative powers and the exclusive right to initiate legislation'. Just prior to the second popular government, these became known as the priorate and were made up of *popolani* or the merchant-elite within the guilds. (2008: 67; 74-81).

¹⁵ The chief military and justice official was called the *Capitano del popolo*. He was a non-Florentine (to ensure neutrality in the case of factional violence), elected for one year, and charged with summoning the city's militias as needed (Najemy 2008: 67).

¹⁶ Made up of international import-export merchants and bankers, the *Mercanzia's* chief purpose as described by Najemy 'was to prevent reprisals and enhance the security of Florentines "throughout the world" by forcing Florentine merchants to honor their agreements and satisfy creditors' (*ibid.*, 110).

electoral reform throughout the *trecento*, which at times benefited a majority of merchant-elite, and at others allowed the rise of more 'new men', the Florentine commune was governed by a large group of citizens,¹⁷ rather than a single authoritative family. The relative stability of the government was intimately tied to the financial wellbeing of the city and *contado*. As Florence's wealth increased owing to its growing prominence in international banking,¹⁸ and wool and textile manufacturing,¹⁹ the guilds²⁰ sought greater representation and control over their social and financial circumstances. The two most notable disruptions to the government by the disenfranchised *popolo* came in 1343 and 1378 when, in both instances, *popolani* misrule had cost the commune hundreds of thousands of florins.

Exacerbated by higher demand, rising labour costs, and an uncertain workforce, the political and economic climate was made even more tumultuous in the wake of the Black Death.²¹ In the aftermath, elite officials made exclusionary changes to the election processes that limited the power of the *popolo* and non-major guildsmen. Amidst the tension of a devastated population, and the ever-present conflict within the ruling of the commune, factions again started to solidify by 1352 (*ibid.*, 144-146). Dividing roughly into banking families, and their

¹⁷ See Trexler 1994: 62-63.

¹⁸ Owing to Guelf allegiance to the Pope during the *trecento*, Florence replaced Siena as the international tax collecting body for the Holy See (Brucker 1969: 53). See also, Goldthwaite 1980: 34.

¹⁹ Brucker states that, 'the woolen cloth industry...provided employment for thousands of workers, producing cloth of such quality that it commanded the highest prices in the fairs, markets, and bazaars of three continents' (1969: 54).

²⁰ Najemy describes guilds as having 'emerged from the need to find collective strength in such associations by those who lacked powerful families. In their guilds, merchants, manufacturers, shopkeepers, artisans, and notaries who did not come from powerful lineages found security, political strength, and cultural identity, much as elite Florentines looked for the same in things in their families' (2008: 40). The distinction between the 'major' guilds and the 'minor' guilds changed throughout the fourteenth century but the ranks of merchants and textile manufacturers generally dominated the guilds of artisans and shopkeepers. Below the major and minor guilds, were skilled and unskilled workers who consistently fought for membership in the guild structure. See also Najemy 1982.

²¹ Goldthwaite suggests that the adjustments made after the Black Death were reasonably well-executed in Florence such that the city's wealth was concentrated in fewer hands, promoting more commerce in luxury goods. Because the demand was higher across Europe (where similar population drops had left more cash for fewer people), Florence benefitted through their production of consumable goods (1980: 33-36). Najemy however, points to the eventual drop in workers' wages owing to the production quotas employed to ensure each firm some sort of survival despite the loss of the work force (2008: 149). Brucker also points to the fragility of the economy at this time due to recurrences of the plague: '[seven] times between 1350 and 1430, the city was struck by plague' (1969: 55).

supporters, and the wool manufacturers, the new factional divide also resurrected the Guelf/Ghibelline aggressions.

By the 1370s, when the papacy began to pose a threat to Florence's independence, expensive measures were taken to prevent attack and Florence, despite its historical loyalty to the papacy, made the decision to fight the advances at all cost, declaring war on the Pope.²² Najemy records that the resulting interdict on March 31, 1376 prohibited 'all religious services in Florence and its territory and declaring Florentines subject to arrest and confiscation of their goods throughout Europe' (2008: 152). Although the commune implemented heavy tax on the clergy, to cover the expenses of war and to act as a 'punishment', the Pope issued an order to all Europe governments ordering them 'not to do business with Florentine merchants and bankers' (*ibid.* 154). Some governments ignored the order, but enough damage had been done to once again spike Florence's overall debt. The war ended in March of 1378 when Pope Gregory XI died, but the destabilisation of the commune had already reached a pitch. A final reincarnation of the popular guild governments of previous decades was launched later in 1378 and then disbanded under the weight of debt, factional disputes, and class struggle in 1382. As a result of the *Ciampi* revolution, and the looming threat of the Visconti Duchy of Milan, new discourses of civic power began to circulate amongst the citizens of Florence. First, as Najemy notes, '[the] notion that workers and the poor constituted a permanent danger became commonplace in the generation after 1382 and sustained deep hostility toward the lower classes'²³; second, in the face of threats from Milan,²⁴ 'political myths' focused on 'the celebration of civic unity' and 'the consensus of all "worthy" men' supported a powerful new ideology which created the fiction of the 'whole Florentine people' (2008: 172-177). For Florentines in the late *trecento*, civil stability was not a common concept until the end of the century when it was appropriated and employed in supporting new mythologies of state-craft. There is no easy way to discuss the political events of the late *trecento*, or their economic ramifications precisely because Florence was in a perpetual state of flux. Although the relative wealth of the Florentine domain at the beginning of the *trecento* was

²² On the 'War of the Eight Saints' see Peterson 2002:173-214.

²³ See also Trexler 1994: 66-67.

²⁴ Najemy provides further details regarding Florence's troubled relationship with Milan (2008: 188-189).

impressive, the citizens who consistently enjoyed that wealth were few. Like many other aspects of late fourteenth-century Florence, the city's wealth, and the structures erected to create it, were chaotic, tumultuous, and always fragile.

(iii) *Florentine Society: Family, Education and the Arts*

The domestic sphere of Florence is perhaps the most readily accessible context for understanding women's experiences in the late *trecento*. Pointing to middle- and upper-class women's locatedness within the home and family is not to suggest their autonomy or authority however. As Klapisch-Zuber asserts, "'houses" were made by men' (1985: 117). The consequences of masculinist ecclesiastical structures and theology for women will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, but the brief survey presented here is intended to provide some insight into the ways in which Florentine social life was as saturated by patriarchal hegemony as were arenas of politics or economy. In *trecento* Florence, the house—both in a physical sense and in terms of lineage—was created and maintained by the patriarch.

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber explains:

In Florence, men were and made the "houses." The word *casa* designates, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the material house, the lodging of a domestic unit....But it also stands for an entire agnatic kinship group. The *casa* in this case designates all ancestors and living members of a lineage, all those in whose veins the same blood ran, who bore the same name, and who claimed a common ancestor—an eponymic hero whose identity the group had inherited.

(1985: 117)

In family chronicles kept by the head of the *casa* (*ricordanze*),²⁵ lineage was recorded and tracked along male genealogies and women, as wives, mothers, daughters, and widows, were recorded in terms of their entrances (*entrare*) or exits (*uscire*). Once a daughter was raised to a marriageable age, her exit from her father's family was then transferred to her entrance into her husband's family. Sons, of

²⁵ *Ricordanze*, according to Najemy, 'began in the fourteenth century chiefly as records of property accumulation and mercantile activity, and then expanded to include genealogies, records of marriages and births, and comments on emotional bonds, typically combining family history, civic chronicle, and personal memoirs with advice and admonition to children and heirs' (2008: 219). See also Lydia Cochrane's 'Foreword' in Klapisch-Zuber 1985: viii.

course, were the sole bearers of the family line and were also the only eligible members for property inheritance.²⁶ Familial structures perpetuated through male lineage, and fathers were the defining figures of a family's existence (*ibid.*, 117-121). Although women were confined to domestic spaces, the organisation of the *casa* was still a responsibility deemed only suitable for the men in the family (Tomas 2006: 318). Aside from attending mass, and occasional religious festivities, middle- and upper-class women's places were in the *casa*. Even with constant changes in the occupants of the *casa* (i.e. from marriage alliances, deaths, births, etc.), the family was the foundational unit of Florentine society. Brucker asserts:

The family constituted the basic nucleus of Florentine social life throughout the Renaissance, and the bond existing between family members was the strongest cement in the city's social structure. [...] It was to the family that the individual owed his primary obligation; the rank and condition of the family largely determined the course which his own life was to take.

(1969: 90-91)

At the root of the familial unit was the marriage alliance, a contract also heavily imbued with social importance by *trecento* Florentines. Marriage alliances between men and women of the middle and upper classes were, first and foremost, a financial contract. As a result of being excluded from inheritance, women were given dowries that were hypothetically attached to them for the length of their lives. Once a woman left the home of her birth, and entered her husband's *casa*, the sum of the dowry was available to the husband for as long as the wife remained (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 117-131). In addition to this initial transaction of transferring the (dowried) woman to her husband's house, marriages also constituted a social contract in that many families relied upon them to strengthen their social status.²⁷ Addressing the financial and social importance of the alliance, Brucker states:

²⁶ Klapisch-Zuber states that, '[the] exclusion of women from inheritance, which can be dated historically, was relatively recent at the time' (1985: 285); the possibility of women's inheritance and ownership in the thirteenth century is explored by Joan Kelly 1984: 19-50.

²⁷ An alternative model of marriage in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (in contrast to this model of pure exchange), is that of sacramental marriage. Focusing on late medieval marriage practices in England in particular, Emma Lipton argues for the importance of sacramental marriage as a model which was based on 'a partnership between husband and wife, the sacramental model favored a horizontal vision, and thus offered a microcosmic alternative for a broader social structure that worked to level the hierarchy of the three estates' (2007: 9). Turning to fifteenth-century English literature, Lipton examines the ways in which sacramental marriage gave the newly burgeoning middle classes of

Marriage connections also had political implications. It was customary for families belonging to the same party or faction to intermarry. Conversely, an alliance contracted with a family in political disfavor was a dangerous and foolhardy enterprise.

(1969: 92)

Thus, marriage alliances were instrumental in building and maintaining familial honour:²⁸ first, in solidifying familial social status; second, through the sequestering of women's chastity insuring that a woman's sexuality and thus progeny, was only subject to one man;²⁹ and finally, through the production of heirs. Children, like the women in a family, were considered property of the father³⁰ and therefore remained

England opportunities to wrest control from nobility and clergy, to establish familial bonds, and to manifest more 'horizontal' social relationships. For *trecento* Florentines, the model of sacramental marriage was most often manifested as chaste marriages between lay religious couples (see for example, Humility's marriage discussed in Chapter Six). Although I cannot do it justice here, I would suggest that a more in-depth exploration of the model of sacramental marriage in the *trecento* could indeed provide a more pro-woman perspective of Florentine marriage, however, I would argue that such a study would differ radically from Lipton's. As I have demonstrated in the first half of this chapter, *trecento* Florentine society cannot be measured by the 'three estate model' as Florence was without nobility, and the magnate families had been forced from power at the beginning of the century. Further, Lipton suggests that the growing importance of the model of sacramental marriage was in part due to the need of the new middle classes to form social cohesion, or group identity. Again, for *trecento* Florentines, whose familial bonds were long-established and a visible aspect of society as a whole, and who belonged to political factions, neighborhood troupes, and guilds or confraternities, establishing group identity was not a new process nor one solely based in marriage practices. Thus, I would suggest that exploring the social and political implications of sacramental marriage, particularly regarding the ways women might be viewed as something other than 'social capital', within *trecento* Florence would warrant careful, contextual study of the kind that I cannot provide here.

²⁸ The importance of (male) honour cannot be understated in *trecento* Florence. Ruggiero links honour to 'the regime of virtù—an ongoing public display of male power, rationality, and control that was central to adult masculine identity, status, and discipline. Of course, the very etymology of the term virtù turns on its Latin root vir, meaning male, and suggests its intimate connection with male culture' (Ruggiero 2006: 296). Recognising the ambiguity and porousness of the concept within discourses which informed early modern Florence, Ruggiero asserts, '[if] one could capture the definition of virtù, one could control real power; thus debates about virtù cut to the heart of how life should be organized and lived' (*ibid.*).

²⁹ Brucker suggests, '[the] sexual mores of the upper class coincided with the Christian ethic in a single respect: in the universal concern for the chastity of its women, before and after marriage' (1969: 106). Further, men's (hetero)sexual behavior was of little concern, 'so long as [a man] did not bring dishonor to his family by marrying a mistress of lowly birth' (*ibid.* 107). I include Brucker's comments here with one caveat: I do not agree with his sentiments that 'Christian ethics' coincided with the 'sexual mores' of the upper class in only one way. Although, I have found much of Brucker's analyses incisive, I would suggest nonetheless that there are problematic echoes of Burckhardt's characterisations of the 'Renaissance' as a 'secular age'.

³⁰ Children's experiences warrant their own investigation; the ways in which their embodied identities were formed, re-formed, erased, and subject to death are complex and beyond the

with the patrilineal family, even when a father's death placed the mother back on the 'marriage market'.³¹ Once born, Florentine infants were often sent off to a wet nurse, either in the *contado* or at the nurses' home in the city. More rarely, a nurse would be hired to live within the home of the family; a practice most often exercised in elite families. Most often, the father arranged the contract with the husband of the wet nurse; the duration of nursing was generally longer for boys than girls; and once the child returned to the *casa*, decisions about education were quickly made (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 133-175).

The rising influence of the *popolo* impacted Florence in a myriad of ways, not least of which was the 'veritable revolution in the history of education' (Najemy 2008: 45). Although literacy and education were commonplace amongst elite families, and within clerical institutions for generations, it was not until the beginning of the *trecento* that large portions of the *popolo* could be considered literate. In fact, according to Najemy, 'by 1300 [one-fourth to one-third] of Florentine men and a sizeable minority of women could read and write, at least in the vernacular, at basic levels of competence' (*ibid.*). Further, a large portion of families in the *trecento* began actively pursuing education for their children by hiring private tutors, or enrolling their children in classes organised by teachers. The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani (d. 1348) estimated that in the 1330's, of the 90,000 people inhabiting the city, approximately 10,000 boys and girls between ages six and eleven were learning basic literacy (*Nuova Cronica* 12. 94). The options for boys and girls following primary education of course differed. Fathers of girls had only a few options for their daughter's future which had to be chosen relatively quickly in the course of the child's life. Within upper class families, many girls were sent to convents for the remainder of their childhood, usually around the age of 7. If their fathers committed them to a religious life, girls often donned a veil by ages 9-11 and completed their vows by 12 or 13. Lower class families also sometimes sent their girls away, committing them to service in the household of wealthier families where they would be employed until they came of marriageable age. In any of these

bounds of this thesis to address. For works which expertly deal with children in *trecento* Florence, see Klapisch-Zuber 1985; Herlihy 1995: 215-246; and Trexler 1994: 171-327.

³¹ This was a fairly common occurrence owing to the fact that women were generally entered into marriage at the age of 18, or younger, whilst men were not married until they were 26-30 (Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 19).

scenarios, a girl's fate was decided well within the first 7 or 8 years of her life, and often meant further separation from her family; unlike boys of similar ages, secondary-level education was not an option for the daughters of the *trecento* (Trexler 1994: 343-372; Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 165-177).

According to Najemy, secondary education for boys came in two forms: '[parents] chose between abacus school, which taught commercial arithmetic and provided training in skills essential to merchants and shopkeepers, and "grammar" school, which taught Latin and classical authors' (2008: 46). In either case, education and increased literacy had very real purpose in Florentine society where 'middle- and even lower-class laypersons kept account books, wrote letters, read guild statutes, signed and needed to understand contracts, and read their payers' (*ibid.*, 46). He elaborates by saying that most schools, or classes were taught by notaries whose 'training in Roman law provided the solid command of Latin and a basic expertise in law', enabling them to write contracts, wills, and a variety of legal documents (*ibid.*). In the classroom setting, Florentine notaries made Roman history, politics, rhetoric and philosophy the foundation of education (Gehl 1993: 204-211). On a wider scale, notaries produced Tuscan translations of classical Latin texts which circulated throughout the *popolo* (Witt 2003: 174-229). The incorporation of Latin texts, and Roman history into education and culture in the *trecento* was so pervasive that by the early 1400's, merchant Giovanni Morelli designed an academic program for his sons which included basic elements like mathematics, reading, and the Bible, but which also placed an emphasis on Latin texts, like those from Virgil and Cicero (Brucker 1969: 240). Similarly, the inventory of merchant Piero di Duccio Alberti in 1400 revealed 'a large number of business papers and ledgers, a book of hours, several Latin grammars and works by the classical authors Aesop, Cicero, Seneca, Eutropius, and Vigentius' (*ibid.*, 216). For the men educated in *trecento* Florence, ancient Latin philosophy and history became commonplace. By the 1390s, teachers like Manuel Chrysoloras (d. 1415) were cultivating interest in classical Greek (*ibid.*, 219). Works by poets like Dante Alighieri (d. 1321), Francesco Petrarch (d. 1374), and Giovanni Boccaccio (d. 1375), all of whom relied upon classical philosophical and theological texts to help shape their narratives, further served to 'popularise' Graeco-Roman literary culture. Even for the young men who were

enrolled as apprentices to guilds, the circulation of philosophical and historical texts would still have provided 'a stimulating intellectual environment' (*ibid.*, 223-224).

Similar to other elements of *trecento* Florence, the visual arts also underwent marked changes (Crum and Paoletti 2006: 10). Viewed in context amidst the social, political, economic and religious layers of Florentine life, the arts must be understood as 'efficacious',³² so much so that any analysis of *trecento* art should reveal the artificial boundaries between art and function to be 'essentially nonexistent' (*ibid.*, 11-15). The functionality of art is clear in the case of Florence's most celebrated early fourteenth-century painter: Giotto di Bondone (d. 1337). Born to labouring parents, Giotto was enrolled as an apprentice to Cimabue in Florence, and produced paintings, drawing, and architecture that are still lauded as revolutionary. His frescoes, which are spread across Florence, Pisa, Naples and Padua, exhibit beauty and skill, but above all, they serve the religious narratives that they were commissioned to portray. White writes that '[competent] realism, strictly limited depth, and absolute subordination to the needs of the narrative scenes are the essence of Giotto's painted architectural schemes' (1987: 311). Giotto's art, which was extraordinary in its execution, became famous for the ways in which it portrayed and made real the religious narratives of the time. Giotto's commissions proliferated throughout the first half of the *trecento* not only because of his growing skill, but also, as White suggests, because of his 'extraordinary ability to find a formal counterpart in terms of areas of paint and colour for the intangibles of spiritual and psychological states' (1987: 315). Just as balances of power shifted within the political arena of Florence throughout the *trecento*, and the focus of education grew and developed as the society itself changed, so too the visual arts of Florence shifted in their functioning and meaning. The changes of the last half of the century—the Black Death, the rise to power of various social groups, and economic changes—were reflected in the art. Most notably, White states, there seemed to be a 'concentration of Tuscan art on transcendental and emotional aims' from 1350-1400 (*ibid.*, 541-542). Millard Meiss similarly located shifts in 'style and taste around the middle of the fourteenth century' (1951: 6). Taking into account the 'series of deeply

³² Brucker states that Florentine art, '[like] learning and education...was functional. It satisfied particular social needs and was influenced by changes in the nature and priority of those needs' (1969: 252).

disturbing events, which provoked in [Florentines] a social, moral, and cultural crisis', Meiss tracks changes in which 'greater animation and spontaneity, and a more fluid mode of expression' were more frequently manifested in works of ritual art (1951: 6-8).³³ Similar to Meiss and White, Klapisch-Zuber also comments on the dynamism of fourteenth-century Florentine art; however she observes that changing needs were not just manifested on the part of the laity. As a result of shifts in the importance of certain ecclesiastical rites, corresponding changes can also be traced in the selected artistic themes for church frescoes and murals (1985: 178-212).³⁴ Religious and ritual art was an integral part of the theatres of everyday life for *trecento* Florentines; its forms, functions, and meanings changed as rapidly as the political structures or the landscape of the commune. Like the physicality, political and economic behaviours, and familial structures of Florence, art was an essential and dynamic element of life in the fourteenth century.

II. Religious Life

The history of the relationship between the church and the commune of Florence is complex, tumultuous, and sometimes tenuous. Following a century of aggressive heresy trials³⁵ and exponential growth within the mendicant orders³⁶ Florence's religious culture rapidly expanded and diversified. As the 1300s began to unfold, the commune's place as 'a chosen city of God' solidified (Dameron 2004: 2-3). George Dameron asserts that by 1328, 'some of the most enduring monuments' had already been produced within the 'religious environment': 'the *Commedia* of Dante, the tower and the frescoes of Giotto, the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Palazzo della Signoria, the Bargello...and the two major friaries of Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella' (2004:3). However, with this type of rapid civic and religious development inevitably came discomfort and struggle. As the wealth of the commune surged, its relationship with the church became increasingly complex.

³³ I examine the problems with Meiss' analyses of *trecento* Florentine ritual art in Chapter Five.

³⁴ Klapisch-Zuber gives the specific example of the increased appearance of the Marriage of the Virgin theme in church commissions, arguing that this shift in themes corresponded with efforts by ecclesiastical institutions to gain tighter control over marriage rites and rituals within the commune (1985: 178-212).

³⁵ Trials aimed at identifying and eradicating heresy largely involved the Franciscans, and particularly, the Spirituals. See Dameron 2004: 229-233; Kieckhefer 1995: 36-39.

³⁶ For a full treatment of the impact of the mendicants, see Lawrence 1994.

According to Najemy, from the mid-thirteenth century, Florence had established and maintained itself as ‘the most important among the popes’ bankers’, a rather curious, and precarious position for a people who spiritually condemned usury, moneymaking, and accumulation of vast wealth (2008: 151). Dameron argues that this was one of the central paradoxes of Florentine religious life: ‘there was pride in a prosperous Florence as a chosen city of God, but disdain for the vices of greed and arrogance that had helped transform it so rapidly into a city divided increasingly between rich and poor, insiders and outsiders’ (2004: 3). The tension inherent in such a position frequently strained the city’s relationship with the papacy (which was itself far from stable throughout the *trecento*).³⁷ Despite these conflicts however, lay participation in confraternities and religious orders reached an unprecedented height. Men and women in the city and *contado* identified themselves as children of God and increasingly attempted to live according to the life of Christ.

The primary exemplars of *imitatio Christi* were the mendicants; their spiritual assistance to the laity, and their services to the poor made them indispensable to Florentine spiritual life. As Najemy explains, ‘[the friars were popular among immigrants in need of the community and social services that the new orders provided or supported: care for the sick, alms for the poor, lodging for travellers, honourable burials, but also preaching and organized devotion’ (2008: 51). The most prominent mendicant orders during the *trecento*, according to Goldthwaite, were ‘[the] Humiliati at Ognissanti, the Servites at the Santissima Annunziata, the Augustinians at Santo Spirito, the Carmelites at the church of the Carmine, and, largest of all, the Franciscans at Santa Croce and the Dominicans at Santa Maria Novella’ (1980: 2). In addition to their care for the poor, mendicants were also valuable to the commune because of their role as preachers. According to Lesnick, ‘[preaching] was the primary means by which the friars communicated with the laity’ (1989: 94). For the laity, another spiritually important aspect of the mendicants’ presence was the formation of lay communities, hospitals and confraternities. Dameron asserts that in Florence, ‘there were five types of confraternities: flagellant (or *disciplinati*), laud-singing (*laudesi*), charitable (for the

³⁷ Often between Avignon and Rome, the Holy See more than once lost control of its territories to local popular governments. By 1378, a schism erupted which divided the church between the two rival seats of Avignon and Rome, lasting for almost 40 years (Najemy 2008: 155; 189).

poor), artisanal, and societies for children (*fanciulli*)' (2004: 53).³⁸ These organisations served a variety of purposes: for the mendicants, fostering confraternities provided a conduit for material gains. Unlike mendicant friars, members of confraternities were not required to take vows of poverty and thus, bequests could be left which could be used by the organisation to assist the community. Confraternities and hospitals also served to provide individual Florentines with ways to develop their spirituality (through regularly singing lauds, for instance)³⁹ and perform acts of charity for their fellow citizens. As Dameron explains:

Hospitals and confraternities served to provide networks of charitable support that helped preserve the social order during this period of significant population growth, immigration, and economic dislocation. They offered shelter and charity for the recently arrived rural immigrants, the homeless, traveling pilgrims, the increasing number of poor, and the seasonal laborers who were so important to the expanding economy.
(2004: 51)

Although most organisations provided at least a minimal level of charity, some had charity more explicitly at the core of their mission. The most famous confraternity by the middle of the *trecento* was the company at Orsanmichele whose original foundation as *laudesi* was overshadowed by their role as the city's main distributor of alms. In fact, according to Henderson, Orsanmichele's account books indicate that 'poor relief was the company's main financial priority; alms constituted 85 per cent of expenditure during the winter of 1324-5' (1994: 200). Members of confraternities were largely artisans, shopkeepers, and merchants who were desirous of living a pious life but who could not renounce their citizenship. Women were also admitted into some confraternities, although not all, and some evidence exists that suggests that there were even entire companies made up of women only (Henderson 1994: 110-111).⁴⁰ Hospitals similarly had a combined purpose in *trecento* Florence:

³⁸ He clarifies that the last two types did not develop until the fifteenth century (2004: 53). For the five types of confraternities and their functions, see also Henderson 1994: 33-73.

³⁹ *Laudesi* were companies that 'had been founded to provide a daily evening service... at which the laity sang lauds to the Virgin Mary and the other patron saints depicted in the altarpieces of their chapels' (Henderson 1994: 34).

⁴⁰ On women-only companies, see also Najemy 2008: 54. Women's participation in confraternities was not unheard of in the *trecento*, and Henderson demonstrates that as the century went on, there were even companies that reversed their policies of excluding women. There were, of course, companies that never allowed women, like some flagellant companies, for instance. Nonetheless, female members were not generally allowed to run

frequently providing shelter and care to those in need whilst also allowing carers and medical practitioners opportunities to demonstrate a love for their neighbours.⁴¹ Moreover, wealthy Florentines had the chance to patronise hospitals in much the same way that one could commission art or architecture for monasteries and convents. The staff of hospitals consisted of doctors but also nurses known as *commessi* or *devoti*, positions with titles that Henderson argues imply ‘a devout commitment to services to the poor sick’ (2006: xxxii). Henderson discusses the opportunities available for women as nurses, in particular: Florentine hospitals, he writes, ‘provided a secure physical environment and free board and lodging’ (2006: xxxii).⁴² Those on the receiving end of the services rendered by confraternities and hospitals were, as previously mentioned, new immigrants, travellers, and the sick. Confraternities also gave alms to the ‘professional poor’, the ‘respectable poor’—citizens who had fallen on hard times—and to widows, orphans, and women ‘in childbed’ (Henderson 1994: 263-267).⁴³ The categories of the professional poor and the respectable poor⁴⁴ included both women and men, although in the case of the latter women were recorded as receiving more of the alms than men. Henderson has suggested that this may reflect a *trecento* Florentine mentality that it was ‘the woman’s job to collect and receive alms’ (1994: 266).⁴⁵ That is not, however, to deny the real financial vulnerability of widows who were

for office during the *trecento*, and their membership in general did not become common until the sixteenth century (Henderson 1994: 110-111).

⁴¹ See also Rubin 1991: 14-25; Park 1991: 26-45; Henderson 1989: 63-92.

⁴² Henderson further asserts that this option was especially attractive to ‘poor widows without family support’ (2006: xxxii). Ward also maintains that for many women, working in a hospital was a way ‘to secure a livelihood’; however, she makes clear that in addition to providing spiritual comfort, women were also ‘expected to look after, wash and feed their patients gently and without complaint, even when they were exhausted’, life in a hospital was not easy (2002: 100).

⁴³ Women who were described as ‘in childbed’ were probably working-class Florentines whose time spent out of the workplace after giving birth put a financial strain on their households (Henderson 1994: 263)

⁴⁴ The professional poor, also called the ‘Poor of Christ’, are described by Henderson as those ‘whose lives were governed by their *Rules*, such as that of the Franciscan order’ (1994: 252). He defines the respectable poor as those who ‘represented and were members of a nuclear family where the head had become temporarily indisposed through sickness, unemployment, or simply was no longer able to support a large young family with his meagre wages’ (1994: 257). A foundational study on the poor and poverty in *trecento* Florence is de La Roncière 1974: 661-745

⁴⁵ Henderson substantiates his hypothesis by presenting the fact that most of the women who received alms from Orsanmichele were recorded as married, i.e. their husbands were still living (1994: 266).

undoubtedly in the most precarious fiscal positions during the *trecento* (*ibid.*).⁴⁶ Through confraternities and hospitals, women from varied social classes were able to perform acts of charity and live pious lives while still maintaining their place in the world; other women relied upon confraternities and hospitals for financial assistance; in many cases, these groups of women were one and the same. Women and men increasingly found appeal in living spiritual lives however for the majority, taking the vows of one of the orders was not possible. In addition to confraternities and hospitals, *trecento* Florence also played host to a growing number of penitential communities and eventually third orders. This was particularly the case for women, who committed to religious communities with greater frequency than men throughout the *trecento*.

The only way for many middle and upper-class Florentine women to 'escape' the direct control of their fathers, husbands, or guardians was through the convent. However, during the *trecento* it was only a relatively small number of women who were able to formally take vows rather than enter the marriage market.⁴⁷ Klapisch-Zuber demonstrates that in spite of the fact that many young women spent at least a portion of their childhoods being educated in nunneries, 'terrible doubts about the security of the cloister continued to torment' wealthy parents (1985: 119). It wasn't just a woman's bodily safety that was in jeopardy in the minds of wealthy Florentines, it was also the family's honour (tied to the young woman's chastity) that was cause for concern (*ibid.*).⁴⁸ Entering their daughter into a convent was also not an option for many lower to middle-class families who could not afford the payment

⁴⁶ Klapisch-Zuber also provides an in-depth analysis of the financial and social situation of widows in early modern Florence (1985: 117-131). See also Chabot 1988: 291-311.

⁴⁷ Although the overall number of women taking formal vows was relatively low, there was nonetheless an increase in the number of nunneries in Florence from five in the thirteenth century to twenty-four by 1336 (Ward 2002: 161). Dameron disputes that there were only twenty-four and suggests a number nearer to sixty-six (2004: 45).

⁴⁸ For an example of *trecento* Florentine suspicions about the 'fragile chastity' of nuns, see Boccaccio 1995: 1-11. Lochrie, who offers a queer reading of fourteenth-century Lollard texts from England, argues that female chastity--and by extension female sexuality--was not treated sceptically solely for its (heterosexual) fragility, but because of medieval anxieties centred on the fact that 'women do not seem to be governed by any natural inclination to chastity or marriage, that, in fact, they "naturally" tend to perverse sexual acts' (2005: xxv). Although I do not have adequate space here, I would suggest that, following Lochrie, tracing *trecento* Florentine anxieties surrounding the increase of communities of women religious, and the ways those anxieties manifested in literature linking female sexuality to 'idolatry, and luxuria, or gluttony', would indeed be a fruitful project for framing 'heterosyncratic' female sexuality. See Lochrie 2005: 47-70.

of a dowry upon entrance and the subsequent costs of clothing and upkeep (Ward 2002:161). Florentine men from upper-class families were also largely discouraged from taking formal vows; entering a monastery would mean renouncing wealth and removing oneself from worldly affairs, including the operation of the family's business.⁴⁹ Examples from as early as the thirteenth century, like that of Francis of Assisi for instance,⁵⁰ demonstrate that young men of upper-class families did sometimes defy the wishes of their parents but this was certainly not the norm. An alternative path for Florentines whose participation in society was non-negotiable for reasons of wealth or social expectation was to join penitential communities.⁵¹ Although more formal than confraternities, penitential communities similarly allowed *trecento* men and women to pursue a religious life without abandoning their civic responsibilities. Vauchez asserts that the fundamental claim of penitents was 'that they could win salvation while remaining faithful to the requirements and values of their lay station: work, family life, and aid to the indigent' (1993: 121). Penitents often wore a characteristic robe or veil, they fasted more frequently than other laymen and women, they were expected to recite the seven canonical hours (or an appropriate number of Our Fathers and Hail Marys if they were illiterate), and they committed to confession and communion four times a year (*ibid.*, 121). In Florence, women who chose penitential lives were known as *pinzochere*, *vestite*,

⁴⁹ In the section above, what becomes apparent is that for 'secular' *trecento* Florentines, strict vows of chastity (or virginity) were virtually non-options. Here again, Salih's analysis of medieval concepts of virginity proves helpful in understanding the disparity between religious ideals and social practices. She writes that for women, although '[anxieties] about legitimacy led elite classes to place a high value on women's virginity, narrowly defined as technical intactness...the virginity of a girl prior to her marriage was barely virginity at all. The telos of virginity is always significant. Secular virginity, because necessarily temporary, includes connotations of availability and desirability' (2001: 18-19). For men, Salih asserts, virginity 'was very nearly a non-existent value...The concerns about lineage and legitimacy which informed families' anxieties about their daughters' sexuality never applied to sons' (2001: 18).

⁵⁰ For further discussion of the ways in which Francis defied expectations and conventions (even in his sanctity), see Cullum 2002: 145-146.

⁵¹ Penitential communities began in the twelfth century and continued to spread through the *trecento*. However as Mario Sensi explains, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 attempted to stop the formation of any new religious orders but the immense popularity of the penitential movement, and its heterogeneous manifestation across Europe, 'took the bishops almost by surprise'. It was not until very late in the fourteenth century and early fifteenth century that the vast array of penitential orders were finally institutionalised and made into Third Orders (1996: 56-83). On the 'institutional crystallisation' of female penitential communities into Third Orders, see Benvenuti Papi 1996: 84-103.

mantellate or tertiaries (Benvenuti Papi 1996: 91). These women were not officially associated with the mendicant orders, but the physical proximity of their communities to the churches, and their patronage of the mendicants, often meant that individual communities formed bonds with single orders (*ibid.*). For example, Benvenuti Papi describes a number of *pinzochere* and tertiaries in relation to their location in the city and their affiliation with local mendicants:

The area around Santa Croce was filled with houses of penitents, which left an imprint even on the place names of the neighborhood. At the same time, the houses of Dominican tertiaries clustered around the walls of Santa Maria Novella; [...] The new order of the Servites was receptive to female devotion, robing the followers of the blessed Giuliana Falconieri in their habit. Later in the fourteenth century, the Augustinians, who were active in the rehabilitation of another type of outcast, the prostitutes, also encouraged a large movement of *mantellate* at Santa Spirito.

(1996: 91)

Benvenuti Papi further explains that these communities of *pinzochere* were often made up of ‘poor and middle-class widows’ who lived together and ‘led decorous lives, measured by communal rhythms and collective devotional practices’ (1996: 92). These women were not bound by vows of obedience, nor were they (for the greater part of the *trecento*) under the same rules of cloister that kept the nuns of Florence from participating in civic life.⁵² Women who chose to live solitary lives of penitence were also present in Florence, although they were far rarer. Frequently, these women lived in rooms of their family homes, or in single cells adjoined to a monastery (Vauchez 1993: 126).

A penitential group that was unique to Florentine men was the flagellants or *disciplinati*. Although they are frequently identified as a confraternity, *disciplinati* were originally founded as part of the penitential movement and in Florence, they placed more emphasis on ‘penitential devotion’ (through flagellation, for instance) than they did on charitable activities (Henderson 1994: 41-44). Rather than attending daily meetings like those men and women in confraternities, *disciplinati* were, according to Henderson, ‘required to spend every alternate Saturday night

⁵² Katherine Gill suggests that even in spite of Pope Boniface VIII’s (d. 1303) constitution *Pericoloso*, passed in 1298, women’s communities in fourteenth and fifteenth century Tuscany did not conform immediately. She writes that ‘strict claustration was not normative for many, perhaps most, women’s religious communities during the last centuries of the Middle Ages. Contrary to what is often assumed, Boniface VIII’s constitution *Pericoloso* did not represent either a dramatic turning point or a culmination in a general acceptance of strict enclosure as a necessary and validating feature of women’s religious life’ (1996: 177).

together in prayers, orations and penitential devotions' (1994: 43). In times of city-wide crises, as in during the Black Death or the War of the Eight Saints, flagellant companies would march through the city in large numbers, flagellating themselves in a demonstration of humility and penitence (1994: 33-37). As both Henderson and Vauchez demonstrate, the primary aim of the *disciplinati* was to imitate Christ and to show the 'redemptive value' of his 'physical suffering' (Henderson 1994: 35; Vauchez 1993: 122-123). Even in spite of the fact that these forms of lay piety became increasingly institutionalised, it is clear that many Florentines took their spirituality into their own hands. This is not to suggest, however, that the church was marginalised during the *trecento*; as I argue below, Florentines believed fully in the rites of baptism, marriage, death and the Eucharist, all of which were instituted solely by the church. Nonetheless, religious life for *trecento* Florentines meant active participation, ever-changing relationships with the mendicants and ecclesiasts, and living a life that was organised around the devotional model of *imitatio Christi*.

The purpose of this chapter has primarily been to provide the backdrop against which a specific investigation of the ways in which women navigated their corporeal and spiritual identities may be executed. During the *trecento*, the commune of Florence physically expanded and the landscape of the city itself underwent constant change. Dynamic politics, influxes of immigrants, the expansion of the merchant classes and disputes about sovereignty kept the commune in a consistent state variability. Moreover, waves of plague and grain shortages meant that the health of the *popolo* was equally as unstable. Discussing the fluctuation of the time period, Ward provides the following description:

Disaster and conflict often made life difficult for the men and women of the later Middle Ages. Their lives were inevitably affected by the demands of the state for armies and money, and warfare, devastation or siege led to loss of kin and livelihood, malnutrition or famine. Little is known about what happened to countless displaced people. Life was always uncertain, and from 1347 recurrent outbreaks of plague made death more frequent than before.

(2002: 13)

The instability of *trecento* Florence was not preventative of growth, however. The increasing prominence of the mendicant orders made the word of God available to wider audiences than ever before. The messages and models provided by the mendicants inspired Florentines to join confraternities, to offer charitable donations

to religious communities, to work in hospitals or even to commit to penitential lives. The religious sphere of Florence was no less dynamic than the political or social elements of *trecento* life. Mendicant cathedrals were newly erected; communities of religious women proliferated; confraternities became crucial conduits of social charity; and varying relations with the papacy put additional pressure on the commune to find new paths towards salvation.

In addition to this brief sketch of the broad religious landscape, *trecento* Florentine 'religion' must also be seen from a doctrinal perspective. The activities, organisations, and practices adopted by Florentines—lay, mendicant, and ecclesiast alike—were informed by, and infused with certain doctrinal currents that grew to be of primary importance throughout the century. The model of *imitatio Christi*, for example, did not become important simply because of the presence of the mendicants, or because of the growing need for charity; intertwined with all of these factors was a fundamental concern with personal and communal salvation. In the following chapter, I will discuss the foundational nature of the doctrine of salvation for *trecento* Florentines. Further, I will identify two additional doctrinal currents, eschatology and materiality, that, through the course of the fourteenth century, became of spiritual relevance. Soteriology, eschatology, and materiality arguably infused all doctrine in *trecento* Florence as I will elaborate in the following chapter; nevertheless, their various effects were diverse and multiple. Desires for salvation elicited an added emphasis on devotion to the life of Christ. Concerns regarding the afterlife, and specifically regarding the newly established concept of purgatory, engendered emphatic acts of charity in efforts to counteract excess wealth. Complex theological discussions of materiality stemmed from the fundamental paradox of matter as both promise and threat. Even in their everyday encounters with the material (through ritual art, for example), Florentines were alternately confronted with matter that could potentially solidify their connection to God, or that could endanger their soul because of its corruption and sinfulness. In outlining these doctrinal elements of Florentine religious life, I want to examine the discursive context within which gendered embodiment was materialised and experienced in the fourteenth century.

CHAPTER THREE DOCTRINAL CURRENTS

I. *Three Doctrinal Currents*

In this chapter I want to identify and examine three intersecting threads of doctrine—soteriology, materiality, and eschatology—relevant to the formation of gendered corporeal identities in *trecento* Florence. In each thread or current, individual doctrines intertwine with similar spiritual concerns and dogmas; within fourteenth-century Florence, all of these doctrinal elements combined in varying and dynamic ways. Soteriology, as the foundational tenet of Christian traditions, motivated many of the eschatological paradigms constructed in the *trecento*. Similarly, so many of the practices adopted in an attempt to imitate Christ were also motivated by the Florentine belief in purgatory. Materiality, as Bynum argues, was a prime concern for Christians and was frequently explored, revered, and sometimes feared via holy matter. These three currents were, as I have stated, fluid in their manifestations. Ultimately, I will argue that it was within this matrix of doctrine that the three theological virtues discussed in the following section—faith, hope and charity—became of particular importance to *trecento* Florentines and furthermore, that they informed discourses that led to the materialisation of gendered embodiment.

(i) *Soteriology and imitatio Christi*

The first and most foundational current of Christian doctrine relevant to an investigation of *trecento* Florentine religious discourses is soteriology. Soteriology was a fundamental aspect of Florentine Christianity; its basic premise was that Jesus Christ, whose human life, sacrificial death, and subsequent resurrection, made possible the salvation of all baptised Christians (John 3:16; John 14: 5-7). Understanding the centrality of soteriology in *trecento* Christian discourses is not only important insofar as it helps to locate Jesus as the paramount object of worship, it is also crucial to note the many implications inherent in the doctrine. Namely, soteriology implies that the conditions human subjects find themselves in are

defective; the need for a saviour hinges on the reality that there is something from which one needs to be saved. Further, doctrines of soteriology or doctrines pertaining to the 'way of salvation', often imply a particular path towards salvation. In terms of religious institutions, soteriology often necessitates ecclesiastic mediation in accessing the divine. On the other hand, however, the way of salvation also often implies that the life of the saviour may provide an imitable example; the spiritual leader illuminates the path towards salvation by virtue of living it. These various implications, in conjunction with theological definitions of the doctrines, engendered discourses that had real formative effects for Florentines. In other words, soteriology was not simply central to the beliefs of *trecento* Florentines, it also produced discourses that determined in some ways the very manner in which men and women performed their spiritual embodied identities towards achieving salvation.

As suggested above, doctrines of soteriology rely on the implication that there is something inherently deficient about human circumstances. In *trecento* Christian paradigms, the human condition was corrupted because of original sin; owing to the acts of Adam and Eve, all of humanity was rendered sinful. This theological formula was analysed by numerous theologians who were concerned with concepts of free will, human sin, and salvation. Augustine in particular was not only remarkably prolific in his explorations of these themes, but his works also had a great impact on subsequent medieval theologians.¹ Augustine begins by pointing towards original sin as the point of corruption for all of human experience:

Human nature was certainly originally created blameless and without any fault [*vitium*]; but the human nature by which each one of us is now born of Adam requires a physician, because it is not healthy. All the good things, which it has by its conception, life, senses, and mind, it has from God, its creator and maker. But the weakness which darkens and disables these good natural qualities, as a result of which that nature needs enlightenment and healing, did not come from the blameless maker but from original sin [*ex originali peccato*], which was committed by free will [*liberum arbitrium*].

(*De natura* III. 3-iv, 4)²

¹ Augustine's influence on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century theologians will be explored further in the following section.

² Translation of *De natura et gratia* (*De natura*) in McGrath 2007: 416.

Although Augustine suggests that the corruption of humanity was not inherent in creation, but rather a subsequent act of evil, human beings by virtue of being born of Adam are nevertheless defined by a nature that is 'not healthy'. Following Augustine, thirteenth-century theologian Bonaventure similarly characterised the human condition as corrupted. Differentiating between what was created and what was altered through free will, Bonaventure asserts that, 'sin is not any kind of essence but a defect and corruption...by which the mode, species and order of the created will are corrupted' (*Brevil. III, 1, 1-3*).³ Thomas Aquinas also debated the essence and nature of original sin, concluding that like an illness of the body, original sin was a sickness of the soul:

For it is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony which was essential to original justice, even as bodily sickness is an inordinate disposition of the body, by reason of the destruction of that equilibrium which is essential to health. Hence it is that original sin is called the "languor of nature".

(*ST IaIIæ. 82,1*)⁴

In all of these theological texts, one can readily observe the link between original sin and degradation of the human condition. Each theologian understood Christian men and women as corrupted and sinful by virtue of their lineage (i.e. being born of Adam and Eve). In fact, Thomas Aquinas discusses in detail the ways in which sin was transmitted biologically from the Edenic couple, making it impossible for any Christian with a human father (because essence is only transmitted by the man) to be free of sin. Thus, the Christian community needed 'healing' by the one man who could not be corrupted by original sin, Jesus Christ. Augustine, writing about human salvation stated, '[but] God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our sins, raised us up to life with Christ, by whose grace we are saved' (*De natura III. 3-iv, 4*).

In the fourteenth century specifically, Christ as the way of salvation inspired discourses centred on imitation and emulation. Florentine soteriological discourses not only conveyed the need for salvation through Christ, they also engendered practices and rituals meant to imitate the life of Christ and therefore, to establish

³ Translation in McGrath 2007: 215.

⁴ This translation is from Thomas Aquinas 2006.

deeper currents of communication between believers and God. The imitation of Christ, or *imitatio Christi*, was not necessarily a new ideal to the *trecento* but owing to several factors, like the dominance of the Franciscans⁵ or the material need for charity, practicing Christ-like rituals became almost universally adopted. For ecclesiastic authorities, mendicants, members of confraternities and laymen and women, *imitatio Christi* meant myriad things. Henderson discusses the ways in which confraternities imitated Christ's admonitions of neighbourly love: in obeying 'Christ's command to His Apostles to love their neighbours as themselves', confraternities effected more than their own spirituality; in fact, '[in] the broadest sense this provided the moral underpinning for the preservation of peace in the commune' (1994: 19). Flagellant communities, whose rituals sometimes focused on mortification of the flesh and who often participated in festivals and parades by publicly whipping themselves as I discussed in Chapter Two, imitated Christ's penitence and suffering (Najemy 2008: 54). The Franciscans found specific significance in Christ's poverty and charity. For instance, Gregory Beirich suggests that in the thinking of Franciscan reformer Ubertino da Casale (d. 1329), '[it] is through this spirit of poverty that "we" are configured to Christ' (2000: 52). According to Ubertino, Beirich asserts, poverty should be understood in the following way: 'it is the root and foundation of evangelical perfection according to its analogy and connection to faith and charity, making for an almost identical relationship between those who practice evangelical poverty and Christ' (*ibid.*). For some *trecento* Florentine women, *imitatio Christi* meant associating with, and adhering to Christ's humanity. Although there were men who also celebrated Christ's human form (like Bernard of Clairvaux or Francis of Assisi), it was women who emphasised it most emphatically in their devotions. As Bynum suggests, '[women] stressed their humanity and Jesus' because tradition had accustomed them to associate humanity with the female....To medieval women humanity was, most basically, not femaleness but physicality, the flesh of the "word made flesh."' (1989: 280). For several women, this focus on, and close association with Christ's flesh manifested in occurrences of stigmata, the ability to taste Christ's blood in visions, or even (as in the case of Clare of Montefalco) to have so thoroughly internalised Christ's suffering flesh that the *arma Christi* manifested inside the

⁵ See Beirich 2000: 54-56.

woman's body (Frugoni 1996: 130-164). The adoption of *imitatio Christi* by *trecento* Florentines not only fostered certain rituals and practices—like charity, civic peace, and asceticism—it also opened a pathway for all Christians to negotiate their own salvation. That being said, however, there were certain elements of salvation that were only available through the church and despite each individual's ability to imitate Christ in practice, there was still a clear message that ecclesiastic mediation was necessary.

Not only did popular mendicant preachers insist to their congregations that spiritual guidance was necessary in order to avoid misinterpretation and therefore, the threat of heresy, ecclesiastic authorities also claimed exclusive rights to performing certain rituals—like confession or communion—which were considered crucial to one's salvation. Debby describes the sermons of two Florentine preachers: the Dominican Giovanni Dominici (d. 1419) and the Franciscan Bernardino da Siena (d. 1444); although their approaches often differed, one similarity was their assertions that the sermons they delivered saved listeners from sin. Debby explains, '[both] prescribed the sermon as a remedy for sins: Dominici talked of a sinner admitting that "the sermons, the divine offices all are directed at my redemption and I neglect them", and Bernardino promised (rather immodestly) that the way to heaven was "to hear fra Bernardino"' (2001: 37). McGrath presents an excerpt from Pope Benedict XII (d. 1342) on the possibility of seeing God in heaven; Benedict XII seems to suggest that mediation is unnecessary but this is only provisionally true:

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following point. According to the general disposition of God, since the ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven the souls of all the saints...and other believers who died after receiving Christ's holy baptism (provided that they were not in need of purification when they died...or, if they did need, or will need, such purification, when they have been purified after death)...have been, are, and will be in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, and are joined with the company of the angels, already before they take up their bodies once more and before the general judgment. Since the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.

(2007: 657)

The believers to whom Benedict's theory applies must have been baptised (a rite performed only by an ecclesiastical authority and in the church), who did not

require any measures of purification (i.e. confession), or if they did need such measures, it was received before death (i.e. unction) or even after death (i.e. prayer services for souls stuck in purgatory). Despite Benedict's last words, that any soul may see God 'without the mediation of any creature', his understanding of the conditions for the soul that enters heaven are entirely predicated on rituals and rites which could only be performed by and received in an ecclesiastical institution. According to the laws set by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, there were seven sacraments in which a Christian must partake in order to secure their salvation; all of these required the participation of an ecclesiastical authority. Dameron outlines the seven sacraments as such:

...baptism, confirmation (administered only by a bishop), confession (contrition, repentance, and satisfaction), Eucharist, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction. The local parish priest was supposed to hear the confessions of his parishioners at least once a year and assign penances, give his flock Communion at least once a year (usually at Easter), and administer extreme unction shortly before death.

(2004: 31)

Thus, ecclesiastical institutions were an integral element to obtaining salvation even in spite of the multiple discourses centred on *imitatio Christi*. *Trecento* Florentines would have understood their possibilities for salvation not only through Christ, and through the life of Christ, but also by virtue of their adherence to specific practices necessitated and sanctioned by the church. Soteriological discourses saturated all aspects of Florentine religious life and engendered real, material conditions in which Christian women and men could perform their embodiments.

(ii) *Eschatology and Purgatory*

Chief among the concerns held by *trecento* Florentines, and related to discourses of salvation, were various eschatological theories and paradigms. The aspects of *trecento* Florentine spirituality and religious life that fall into this category pertain to the details of the destination, form, and matter of the afterlife. This was in part due to the growing fascination with Christ's own resurrection. It was not only the case that Christ served as the conduit of human salvation, but he was also the ultimate exemplar of salvific life, death, and resurrection. Therefore a thorough understanding of Christ's experiences on earth, of his human physiology, and of the

possible means by which his body and blood could be present in the Eucharist was necessary not only to grasp the ways in which Christ provided salvation through his death, but also so that heavenly resurrection became possible for all human beings. As Bynum suggests, 'the return of bodies at the end of time is central to the Christian hope for individual, personal salvation' (2011: 246). Christians in the *trecento* speculated a great deal about Christ's bodily fluids, both the production and remnants (*ibid.*, 246-250); they produced complex and detailed analyses of Christ's embryology (Barnes and Petrie 2007: 73); the debates surrounding beatific vision re-emerged (Tugwell 1990: 133-148); and discussions of transubstantiation circulated consistently.⁶ Understanding precise processes of transformation from life, to death, to eternal life was not only crucial in appreciating the power of God, it was also integral to faith in, and hope for individual salvation. Thus, discussions and debates regarding 'the end of things' undeniably informed the religious landscape of *trecento* Florence.⁷

The most notable thread of eschatological discourses in *trecento* Florence was centred on the concept of purgatory. Informed by sources like the Bible and Augustine's *Confessions*, purgatory became an officially recognised doctrine of the church at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 (Le Goff 1986: 1-14). Le Goff describes the evolution of purgatory beginning in the early Christian church:

When, between the second and fourth centuries, Christianity set itself to thinking about the situation in which souls find themselves between the death of the individual and the Last Judgment, and when, in the fourth century, the greatest Fathers of the Church conceived of the idea (shared, with minor differences as we shall see, by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine) that certain sinners might be saved, most probably by being subjected to a trial of some sort, a new belief was born, a belief that gradually matured until in the twelfth century it became the belief in Purgatory.

(1986: 3)

Le Goff points out that by the twelfth century, purgatory had taken on a very spatial dimension such that belief in the concept meant belief in a particular location or

⁶ Transubstantiation was officially addressed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 (Bynum 2011: 157). Many medieval theologians engaged in the debates surrounding the transformation of the Eucharist; the theologies of Thomas Aquinas are one example that will be examined the following section.

⁷ The relevance and urgency of these debates was also affirmed by the material circumstances in which *trecento* Florentines found themselves. As mentioned in the previous chapter, waves of plague and grain shortages brought the 'hereafter' into the daily lives of many Florentines.

destination. Fundamentally, purgatory was a transitional space where the newly dead may be subjected to certain trials but also where they might be assisted by prayers from the living; it was, in essence, a second chance for an eventual, eternal life in heaven (*ibid.*, 5). Purgatory also implied that salvation was possible, or in some cases impossible, on an individual basis. Le Goff asserts that even in spite of humanity's inherent collective 'guilt', 'man is judged for the sins he himself is responsible for committing' (*ibid.*). Thus, purgatory was not only relevant in terms of ecclesiastically sanctioned eschatological paradigms, it was also a crucial element in an individual's conception of their own salvation. As a formative discourse, purgatory served to situate every Florentine within a spatial, temporal framework where their own specific sins would determine their ultimate destiny. Further, as Bynum asserts, the efficacy of this trope relied upon embodiedness. Medieval Christian otherworld-narratives not only described the ways in which purgatorial trials centred on bodily fragmentation, corruption, degeneration and eventual regeneration (or regurgitation as the case may be), but they also used the body as a way to maintain unique identity even after death (Bynum 1995: 291-298).⁸ The development and evolution of belief in purgatory was also made particularly relevant to Florentine eschatological paradigms by Dante Alighieri (Dameron 2004: 6). A Florentine himself, Dante's explorations of purgatory in *The Divine Comedy* was tempered by his experiences of the corruption, greed, and excessive wealth characteristic of the commune. Blossoming merchant and banking trades in Dante's life not only exacerbated the chasm between Florence's wealthy and the desperately poor, they also increased the commonness of usury, a practice condemned throughout the history of Christianity. Le Goff has established, however, that the idea of purgatory became an integral thread of Florentine Christian discourse 'by making the salvation of the usurer possible' (1986: 305). Addressing the ways in which Florentines used purgatory to navigate the vast economic changes of their commune, Dameron similarly suggests that ideas of purgatory were also a source of tension and paradox:

Central to the spiritual traditions of medieval Florentines was the idea of purgatory, a concept that paradoxically helped legitimize and promote the triumphant economic development of the commune. [Those

⁸ Gragnolati also suggests that Dante's writings on purgatory point towards the body as an integral and desired component of the individual (2007: 117-137).

Florentines] benefiting most from an expanding economy found that their testamentary legacies for postmortem masses, the recitation of the Divine Office, and charitable giving—all intended to lessen time spent in purgatory—offered them and their families hope for ultimate salvation in a world that was dominated by usury and moneymaking. Purgatory gave them permission—if not actually an incentive—to create wealth without the certainty of inescapable damnation.

(2004: 6)

Though excessive wealth and material gains were preached against and disavowed by both the ecclesiastical church and the mendicants, the concept of purgatory—and all of the rituals that it engendered—enabled wealthy Florentines to compensate for their gains. It is not to say that Florentines felt easy about their wealth, nor that they felt entirely liberated from their sins, but the discourses focused on purgatory were paradoxical enough to both allow Florentines their material gains and to entreat them to foster and perpetuate the civic social services maintained by religious communities.⁹

The centrality of beliefs in purgatory to Florentine Christian discourses is not only notable in that it enabled and created specific economic conditions,¹⁰ it also contributed to the various ways Florentines perceived corporeality. Further, eschatological concerns, and specifically ideas about purgatory, were often sites of paradox that both condemned and necessitated human materiality. As I shall discuss in the following section, materiality and paradox were also fundamental discursive currents in the *trecento* Florentine landscape.

(iii) *Materiality and Paradox*

As I discussed in the introductory essay of this thesis, Bynum's monograph *Christian Materiality* has as its basic premise the argument that materiality was central to medieval Christian spirituality and that the ways in which Christians conceptualised the material were fundamentally paradoxical. This analysis is particularly relevant for a study of *trecento* Florence. Matter, as it manifested in holy objects, profane objects, or in human bodies, was the focus of a number of influential theologies that were circulating throughout the *trecento*. Moreover, for the majority of Florentines,

⁹ The relationship between beliefs in purgatory and the Christian virtue of charity will be discussed further in the second half of this chapter.

¹⁰ In fact, Le Goff argues that the possibility of salvation for the usurer gave birth to capitalism (1986: 305).

interaction with the divine was mitigated through ritual material objects that were understood not simply as representations of the Holy Spirit, but as a physical manifestation. In both the theologies and their personal interactions with ritual material objects, Florentines were presented simultaneously with the divine perfection of matter (because it was created by God), as well as matter's potential for corruption and change (because it existed on earth). Beginning with theology, concerns with materiality can be found in myriad texts but one particularly demonstrative example comes from the works of Thomas Aquinas. Informed as much by Aristotle as he was by Augustine, Aquinas' works intertwine processes of physical science (like biological processes), with theology. The text presented here reveals Aquinas' approach to the material processes of the miracle of transubstantiation. Rather than simply claiming that the miraculous changes made in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist are God's work, Thomas affirms the supernatural power of transubstantiation by discussing conversions according to the laws of nature. He writes:

This conversion is not like natural conversions but is wholly supernatural, brought about only by the power of God....All conversion which takes place according to the laws of nature is formal....But God...can produce not only a formal conversion, that is, the replacement of one form by another in the same subject, but also the conversion of the whole being, that is, the conversion of the whole substance of A into the whole substance of B. And this is done in this sacrament by the power of God, for the whole substance of bread is converted into the whole substance of Christ's body....Hence this conversion is properly called transubstantiation.

(*ST IIIa*. 75, 2-5)¹¹

One can observe that it is not purely the miracle with which Aquinas is concerned. He refers repeatedly to 'the substance' of the Eucharist and the process of conversion according to the laws of nature (in other words, according to earthly existence). It is not to say that these theories are not concerned with the miraculous power of God. Rather, the ways in which Aquinas is able to make sense of, and properly revere the supernatural conversion of bread and wine to body and blood is through materiality; through addressing the ways in which the 'stuff' of the Eucharist behaves. The debates surrounding transubstantiation also reveal the ways medieval and early modern theologies of matter were inherently paradoxical.

¹¹ Translation in McGrath 2007: 562-563.

Although the miraculous potential of matter allowed Christians to partake in the blessing of receiving Christ's body and blood, it also presented the troubling possibility that rituals of the Eucharist were tantamount to cannibalism. As Bynum explains, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there were real worries that through transubstantiation, 'the flesh of God' might be exposed 'to digestion and excretion' (2011: 177). In response, theologians argued that to think of the Eucharist in such terms was heretical; however, this left them with the problem of explaining at what point transubstantiated matter began to be body and blood and what point it ceased to be so (*ibid.*). Even in Aquinas' text above, we can see his concern to account for the completeness of the transformation, 'the whole substance of A into the whole substance of B'. He seems keen to eradicate any doubt that the transformation of the material into the supernatural is complete. Theological definitions of materiality as both potential and problem in *trecento* Florence are also evident in the ways theologians described human bodies. This point of investigation will be analysed further in the next chapter.

Matter and materiality was also an important part of the ways Florentines interacted with God on a more regular basis. An integral part of both personal piety and institutional worship, ritual art—in the form of frescoes, altar-pieces, triptychs, miniatures, etc.—was not merely a vehicle for conveying meaning; its stuff was imbued with the divine. Frugoni discusses the various ways in which Christians used ritual art to aid their own relationships with the divine and suggests that, 'it was not the figure in a long-pondered painting that animated the mental transposition of a vision, but rather the material object itself, the panel or sculpture, that suddenly came to life and filled with impassioned meanings' (1996: 132).¹² One merely needs to look at the proliferation of Christian accounts of art that came to life to appreciate the ways in which materiality brought out the divine. As Frugoni suggests, '[the] long list we could easily make of crucifixes that bleed or speak, display their sores or offer their wounds to be kissed, of tormented and weeping Virgins, testifies to an almost obligatory experience in the life of a mystic and confirms the crucial importance of

¹² Here again, one may think of the works of Giotto which were considered masterful even during his lifetime for the ways in which they enveloped the viewer in various psychological and spiritual states.

images for ascesis' (*ibid.*). In the *vitae* of Aldobrandesca of Siena,¹³ for instance, the importance of matter becomes obvious in her reaction to an especially visceral vision. Frugoni writes that after intense meditation on Christ's Passion, Aldobrandesca 'felt an overwhelming desire to see the nails' from the cross which were subsequently brought to her by an angel; '[the] "memory" of this vision remained so firmly implanted in her that she promptly made an identical nail from a branch in her garden' (1996: 134). The nail she made became so characteristic of Aldobrandesca's piety that she is often depicted in paintings holding the nail in her hand (*ibid.*). It is important to note that for Aldobrandesca to feel sustained by her vision, for her to demonstrate her connection with Christ's Passion sufficiently, it was necessary for her to have a material artefact. Aldobrandesca's vision and the resultant creation of the nail exemplify the ways in which *trecento* Christians understood the divine as inextricably bound up with materiality. As was the case with theological treatments of materiality, every-day interactions with matter could also present Florentines with a problem as much as it could present them with divine promise. The ways in which materiality threatened *trecento* Florentines are complex but one paradigm in which the danger of matter is easily recognised is in their understandings of leprosy. In 1325, a civic statute was established in Florence that mandated the identification and expulsion of all lepers within the city. Henderson suggests that this policy was predicated on the belief that the disease of the lepers infected the air and spread sickness to anyone who went near (1994: 244). Adding to this theory, Bynum further suggests, 'that at this period, the conceptualization of leprosy as living decay [also] achieved prominence. [...] leprosy was seen not merely as sickness but also as a particularly virulent manifestation of sin and of God's wrath at sin' (2011: 186). Thus, for *trecento* Florentines, it was the very embodiment of the leper that threatened the functioning of salvation; the materiality of the leper's flesh was a visible representation of sin and therefore, it

¹³ Siena was a neighbouring city-state with which Florence had much in common; including, at various points, some citizens who (for multiple reasons) moved back and forth between the two cities. It is not to suggest that their religious communities were not in some ways distinct, however owing to the porousness of the 'boundaries' between Siena and Florence throughout the *trecento*, it is not inappropriate to include Aldobrandesca's example here. On the relationship between Florence and Siena in the *trecento*, see Najemy 2008: 69-71; 189-193.

presented a danger more than it was a manifestation of the goodness of God's creation.

The ways in which materiality conveyed the divine, defied simple explanation, provided the locus of worship, and became the cause for exclusion exhibits the very nature of materiality as paradox. The paradox of materiality is but one example of the ways in which *trecento* Florentines frequently negotiated powerful contradictions more generally. As Bynum suggests, these simultaneous assertions of irreconcilable realities provided both opportunities and points of tension. For *trecento* Florentines this was true in many diverse ways. Doctrines regarding entry to heaven, like the one postulated above by Benedict XII, both affirm the grace of God and the possibility available to all Christians, whilst also restricting access to only those who fit the very specific criteria for salvation as outlined by the church. Theological philosophy, like the works of Thomas Aquinas, operated both to celebrate the miraculous and mysterious workings of God, whilst simultaneously relying upon the biological and philosophical understandings of matter made known by Aristotle. Dameron points towards one of the most obvious paradoxes of Florentine culture: the mutual embracing of mercantile progress with the ardent condemnation of material wealth and excess. As Frugoni points out, even the figure of Christ himself became a paradoxical figure in many of the representations popular amongst Florentines:

A definite narrative has been transformed into a devotional image, whether the Virgin appears bent over Christ's body in a final embrace or contemplating his corpse laid on her lap, or—as in the *Ecce Homo*—resting her cheek against that of her son, a living cadaver half-risen from his tomb...Christ becomes a paradoxical image of non-human death.

(1996: 149)

These instances of paradox are by no means exhaustive of all the ways in which *trecento* Christianity proved both promising and problematic. Nevertheless, they exemplify the simultaneous tension and possibility for creativity which *trecento* Florentines frequently faced and have particular implications for questions of gendered embodiment.

It was against a background of huge conflict and uncertainty, as well as in the context of dynamic developments in religious, social and legal ideas and practices that *trecento* Florentine women's embodiments materialised and were performed.

In order to begin to demonstrate the ways in which Christian doctrine was instrumental to the materialisation of gendered embodiment, it will be necessary to further narrow the range of investigation. As a result of the innumerable discourses that were informed by the three doctrines outlined above, the next section of this chapter will provide an introduction discussion of the three theological virtues, in particular which will then be elaborated in the following chapter. The three Christian virtues of faith, hope, and particularly charity were of paramount importance for *trecento* Florentines. Their centrality to Florentine spirituality materialised not only because of the ‘rediscovery’ of ancient Graeco-Roman philosophies but also because of the events (discussed above) that unfolded throughout the century. As a result, I will assert that the virtues of faith, hope and charity contributed to the formation and performance of gendered bodies in *trecento* Florence.

II. The Relevance of Faith, Hope and Charity

The three virtues of faith, hope and charity were not theologically novel in the fourteenth century. However owing to intellectual and devotional trends, and historical events, they do warrant sustained attention. As scholastic fields like, ‘natural philosophy’, began to appear regularly in both religious and ‘secular’ university curricula, questions surrounding the nature of ‘man’—usually set forth in ancient texts like those by Aristotle—influenced intellectual inquiry of theological and non-theological content, alike.¹⁴ Those thinkers concerned with the spiritual state of man, more than his chemical or anatomical composition,¹⁵ began by

¹⁴ Roest suggests that even in spite of ‘warnings against the pursuit of pagan learning’, the study of philosophies ‘soon became more than a marginal affair in Franciscan circles’ (2000: 140). Moreover, ‘mendicant schools of philosophy...more or less followed the basic outlines of the *quadrivium* courses in the arts faculties of Bologna, Paris and Oxford’ (*ibid.*). For a list of some of the standard works of natural philosophy included in university curriculum by 1250, and for evidence of Aristotle’s prominence amongst those works, see Roest 2000: 140-141. Other philosophers, like Avicenna and Averroes, also informed fourteenth-century university education; see Marenbon 1991: 50-64. For a more general overview of university education during the fourteenth century, see Maierù 1994; Leff 1975 and Scott 1993.

¹⁵ This is not to suggest that these concerns did not overlap, or that philosophies of anatomy and physiology did not inform theology; Thomas Aquinas, for instance, developed what

contemplating the concept of Original Sin. This was an appropriate starting point not only because it explained the inherence of man's sinful condition, but also because it presented questions of free will, obedience, soul, destiny, and most importantly, man's relationship to God. Intermingled with these were theological definitions of faith, hope, and charity. In texts by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, or Peter Lombard, which were integral to religious university education, these three virtues were intimately tied to questions of ontology. Unlike the cardinal virtues, the theological virtues could not be developed or learned;¹⁶ instead, faith, hope and charity were given to humanity through divine revelation. Further, the virtues themselves were considered to be 'divinely infused' (Waldron 1912). In each virtue, man's human state is supplemented by 'supernatural' powers such that achieving salvation and everlasting life (a perfect, divine state) becomes possible for an otherwise imperfect human being. More specifically, faith is the 'supernatural light' which infuses man's intellect and moves him towards God; hope is the divine virtue which perfects man's will; and charity (frequently translated in fourteenth-century Florence as *caritas* or *agape*) is the virtue which unites man's soul to God through love of God's intrinsic goodness. These three virtues, therefore, reflected some of the complex ways Christian theologians perceived the composition of man; faith, hope and charity were not understood as behavioural, but rather, as intrinsic to man's existence and crucial for his salvation. The ways in which these virtues were hierarchically organised further emphasised their metaphysical element. Faith and hope were linked to fallible aspects of human nature—the intellect and the will—both of which were also perceived of as temporal and anchored in material existence. However charity (unity to God through love), was defined as being timeless and therefore superior to faith and hope (*ibid.*).¹⁷ Only Christ, whose spiritual perfection and

Thomasset calls 'a rather fanciful theory' of Christ's conception which was heavily informed by medieval medical philosophy (1992: 42-69).

¹⁶ Bejczy identifies the cardinal virtues as prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance and observes that '[most] classical authors considered the four [cardinal] virtues as attitudes to be developed through study and practice, either in public life or in the retired existence of the wise' (2011: 1).

¹⁷ Of charity, Brodman writes, '[in] a broad sense, charity comes to denote an affection that is nonphysical and directed primarily toward God' (2009: 3). He goes on to suggest however, that by the Middle Ages, charity 'came to carry this sort of material connotation, often expressed as a meal offered to guests or shared by members of a particular group' (*ibid.*, 4). As I shall suggest, this 'material connotation' is inextricably bound up with the burgeoning devotion to the imitation of Christ.

sacrifice resulted in his resurrection and ever-lasting life, embodied all three theological virtues perfectly.

The theological definitions of the virtues outlined thus far were not only circulated within the universities. The laity also came to understand these premises primarily by two means: preaching, and the popular adoption of the devotional model of *imitatio Christi*. Indeed, Kieckhefer notes that, '[both] Dominicans and Franciscans devoted themselves fervently to the homiletic mission, and going to hear them preach constituted an important part of later medieval devotional practices' (1987: 82-83).¹⁸ Further, as discussed in the previous two chapters, the lived example of the mendicants also provided the laity with foundations for imitating the life of Christ; this model of devotion not only served to perpetuate Christocentric piety in the *trecento*, but it also emphasised the particular importance of the virtue of charity. The devotion to Christ's life was made most familiar to *trecento* Florentines by mendicants like Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi. Following their earlier examples, fourteenth-century Florentines came to understand Christ's charity in two ways. On the one hand, Christ's own poverty, his association with the poor, and his acts of kindness served as the basis for Florentine expressions of charity. On the other hand, charity as union with God was celebrated through a devotion to Christ's embodied humanity. The virtue of charity was expressed in Christ's flesh, for *trecento* Florentines, because Christ was God incarnate and therefore, his humanity formed the bond between humankind and God. To celebrate Christ's human body was to love God for his sacrifice and goodness and further, to worship the union between God and man; these elements were the fundamental basis for theological definitions of charity. The two strands of charity were often interwoven in their application. In practice, *trecento* Florentines imitated Christ's commandment to 'love they neighbour as thyself' (Matthew 22: 39). This meant a variety of things for Florentines including membership in confraternities, giving alms, patronising men and women religious, or offering care

¹⁸ Echoing this assertion, Bornstein writes that 'the great preaching orders of Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, were responsible for cultural mediation and indoctrination on a scale that no other group could match' (1996: 1). For further discussion of the centrality of preaching to mendicant education, see Roest 2000: 272-320 for the Franciscans and Tugwell 1988: 15-31 for the Dominicans.

to the sick.¹⁹ Furthermore, charity could be expressed through a devotion to Christ's very flesh. For Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, man's unifying bond of love with God materialises precisely in the humanity of Christ:

I think this is the principal reason why the invisible God willed to be seen in the flesh and to converse with humans as a human. He wanted to recapture the affections of carnal beings who were unable to live in any other way, but first drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love.

(*Sermones super Cantica Canticorum* 20. 6, 1: 118, 21-6)²⁰

In Christ, charity and materiality are intertwined perfectly and thus, even in the imperfect flesh of humanity, charity remains divine because of Christ's bond to God. Whilst the impact of Bernard's Christological thinking— especially his emphasis on the carnal love of Christ—on fourteenth-century theology should not be underestimated (Stiegman 2001: 151, n.83), for *trecento* Florentines, charity arguably became most recognisable in the figure of Francis. It is almost certain that Francis too was influenced by Bernard's theology²¹ because his imitation of Christ was also thoroughly focused on Christ's humanity. According to Cousins, 'Francis was first and foremost intent on imitating Christ in poverty and on creating a life-style based, as he believed, on the essence of the Gospel' (1987: 381). It was Christ's years as 'a wandering teacher and preacher who had no permanent home, who went about his ministry unencumbered by physical possessions' which Francis relied upon most to order his own way of life (*ibid.*). Henderson notes that the Franciscans maintained Francis' example in *trecento* Florence by helping to establish lay institutions that were encouraged to 'serve the community', and to '[express] their love of God through helping the poor' (1994: 23). Of course, it was not just Christ's lifestyle to which Francis felt devoted: the most famous aspect of Francis' spirituality was, like Bernard's, a focus on Christ's corporeality. As Cousins suggests, Francis 'attempted to

¹⁹ As a result of these types of social charity, Christian definitions of poverty were broadened. As Brodman observes, it was not only the 'professional poor' who were deemed as 'hallowed' in the fourteenth century, but also those with real, material needs; the 'association with Christ', who had no home or possessions, cast a new light of piety on a greater part of the population (2009: 15). See also Henderson 1994: 245-246.

²⁰ Translation by Stiegman 2001: 132; 148, n. 24.

²¹ Hellman states, 'Francis was formed by and responded to the many conflicting spiritual, political, and ecclesiastical currents prominent at the close of the twelfth century and the beginning of the great thirteenth century. His own writings show acute awareness of these movements as well as an appreciation of both the scriptural and liturgical texts' (1987: 32).

embody in his own person [Christ's] life-style, even in concrete details' (1987: 381). Two years before his death, on Mount La Verna where he had been 'secluded in prayer', Francis received stigmata on his hands, feet and on his side, clearly demonstrating his spiritual proximity to Christ (Hellman 1987: 36). Francis' stigmata, Cousins writes, were interpreted 'as the ultimate embodiment of his imitation of Christ and the ultimate seal of divine approval' (1987: 381). For many Florentines, Christ's and Francis' stigmata marked a material connection to the divine, they embodied perfectly the union between the soul and God. In this way, charity was not only spiritually explored through 'neighbourly love', but also through fleshly conformity with the divine.

Charity was made an even greater part of Florentine religious experience by the development of the doctrine of purgatory. In the previous chapter of this thesis, I discuss the ways the *trecento* understanding of purgatory played an instrumental role in eschatological discourses; intricately tied into this doctrinal current were practices of charity. For many Florentines, practising charity by giving alms, or by helping to carry out post-mortem masses for the souls of fellow confraternity members was not just done out of a love for one's neighbour, but also out of concern for one's own soul. The increasing wealth of the middle and upper classes brought the prospect of time in purgatory to the fore for these well-to-do citizens. In an attempt to secure their (immediate) salvation, and that of their families, many Florentines relied on acts of charity to 'buy' back some of their afterlife. Brodman describes this intersection of charitable practices with concerns about purgatory in the following way:

Parochial rites, such as funerals and commemorative masses, as well as the religious support of one's confraternity, all came to play their parts in a strategy for gaining admission into heaven. In the calculus of salvation, furthermore, assistance to neighbors, even if postmortem, in the form of testamentary grants for worthy causes, would assist the quest for heaven. Not only would one's confraters earn such merit corporately as a result of their collective acts of charity, but they were also called upon individually to act as manumissors, or executors, to administer a decedent's patrimony for the maximum benefit of his soul.

(2009: 190)

Dameron even goes so far as to suggest that fears surrounding purgatory were the primary motivation for many Florentines to act charitably whether through corporate means (i.e. belonging to confraternities), or on an individual basis (2004:

164-216). This seems to oversimplify the variety of charitable acts and spiritual expressions of charity observable in *trecento* Florence. Nonetheless, to deny the impact of the concept of purgatory on Florentines' piety—and specifically, on their charitable actions and devotions—would be equally superficial. Ultimately, charity and concerns of salvation in the afterlife frequently intertwined. As Brodman argues, 'underlying any decision to assist such individuals ['miserable persons'] was a religious motive, whether it be a selfless love of God and neighbor or a more selfish concern with one's own sin and salvation' (2009: 10).

Finally, as highlighted in Chapter Two, social and economic changes throughout the *trecento* made the need for charity all the more pressing. The increasing establishment of confraternities offered many Florentines the opportunity to participate in 'corporate charity' by contributing to alms distributed by their organisation, or offering funerary services for their fellow members. Conceptually, membership in confraternities meant, according to Becker, adhering to 'the idea of charity...as a collective enterprise....the City of God was understood to be the Christian community of those having charity in their hearts rather than self-love' (1974: 193). The continued influx of people from the *contado* into the city also meant that the need for beds was steadily on the rise (Dameron 2004: 54). In the case of some wealthy Florentines, charitable hospitals were built or already-established hospitals were subsidised through patronage to serve the ever-changing community (Henderson 2006: 34-69). For Florentines of more limited means, they might leave behind their bed linens and the bed space itself for the disenfranchised (Barone 1999: 60). The plague of 1348 was perhaps the strongest impetus for increased practices of charity; the need for care increased but even more so, the need to care for the dead became of central importance (Becker 1974: 177-178). Here again, confraternities played a major role in giving their members important burial rites and commemorations during a time when ecclesiastical institutions simply could not keep up with the demand for care of the dead (Banker 1990: 302-327). Several grain shortages through the century also meant that charitable distribution of food became a necessity (Najemy 2008: 109). As with care for the dead, the Florentine *commune* could not meet the demand of its citizens and so frequently, wealthy lay women would prepare food in their homes to distribute to the poor and sick housed in the

hospitals (Barone 1999: 60).²² Charitable monetary donations to communities of men and women religious were also common in the *trecento*, particularly during times of political tension when the prayers of religious communities were needed to aid and protect the city (Henderson 1994: 242). Thus, in summary, charity was of particular importance for *trecento* Florentines for theological, devotional and socio-economic reasons. Florentines' practices and spiritual explorations of this virtue were primarily motivated by salvation—both on an individual, as well as on a communal basis—but they also intersected with very real eschatological concerns. Further, as the century progressed, charity took on a decidedly material character through devotional models centred on Christ's flesh, and through material distribution of resources. In the following chapter, I shall review some of the textual sources for *trecento* Florentine understandings of faith, hope and charity and in the process, further demonstrate the ways in which the virtue of charity came to be of prime importance.

²² See also, Bynum 1987: 190-193; 221-222; 233-234; 275-276.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY

The doctrinal currents outlined in the previous chapter broadly informed the religious environment of *trecento* Florence. The ways in which spiritual concerns of salvation, the after-life, and materiality intersected are, of course, innumerable. In order to investigate more precisely the material effects these intersecting currents had on religious embodiment, this chapter will focus on the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. My purpose in further narrowing my research will become apparent in two ways: firstly, I have chosen to focus specifically on the theological virtues in order to better demonstrate how the doctrinal currents previously discussed affected both ecclesiastical and lay piety alike; secondly, by discussing the relevance of these virtues to *trecento* Florentines specifically, it becomes clearer how certain discourses which formed around doctrines of charity in particular precipitated gendered embodiments. I begin by exploring Florentine understandings of faith, hope and charity by analysing well-known (and circulating) texts such as those by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard. As I will establish, charity was the most prominent virtue for Florentines not only for social and economic reasons but also due to theological definitions. Although not initially obvious, I argue that the theological discussions of virtues were not universally applicable to all Florentines and in fact, they contributed to the materialisation of the ideal religious embodiment as upper class and male. In the second part of this chapter therefore, I undertake a gender-critical analysis of theological definitions of the virtues and of the ways these definitions were put into practice by *trecento* Florentines. Despite the fact that women were perceived as being appropriately suited to practice charity (because, for instance, of their already well-defined roles as food-preparers and carers), and identified as the primary recipients of charity (as widows, or as members of the 'honourable poor'), discourses of charity nevertheless perpetuated women's embodiment as damaged. This discursive positioning is not only evident in the ways women's practices of charity were 'supervised', but also more elaborately in the proliferation of behavioural guides authored by religious and civic authorities

concerned with the application of virtues to Florentine women's corporeal identities. Rather than simply being prescriptive, *trecento* behavioural guides were perniciously descriptive of contemporary discursive definitions of women's spiritual embodiment. This chapter will conclude, therefore, with a discussion of the ways discourses of virtues (as expressed through practices of charity and behavioural guides), on one level enabled Florentine women to express their piety through acts of charity, and yet on another level, perpetuated normative definitions of gendered embodiment such that women's embodied identities were always framed in damaging ways, further marginalising or excluding women from Florentine public life.

I. Some Textual Sources for Faith, Hope and Charity

Faith, hope and charity have been theologised by Christians from the Patristic period to the modern day and the variety of texts one might reference, even with exclusive reference to *trecento* Florence, is vast. Therefore the texts analysed in this section are not exhaustive with respect to Florentine theological treatises on the three virtues. Rather, writings by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Peter Lombard and Bonaventure are representative of some of the most established theological definitions of faith, hope and charity in the *trecento*. Augustine's presence amongst the other three medieval theologians is justified firstly by his textual prominence in the curricula of theological universities and within the growing mendicant libraries. Dunlop notes that 'the fourteenth century has been called an "Augustinian" age' and that owing to intellectual trends focused on 're-discovery', 'even the corpus of [Augustine's] writings expanded as scholars searched libraries and manuscripts' (2007: 12). This expansion and textual influence is made most apparent by the ways in which prominent works like those of Peter Lombard or Bonaventure¹ promote or reproduce Augustine's writing. Meredith Gill demonstrates that, outside of the university setting, Augustine's *City of God* was 'one of the first printed books' and that

¹ Fitzgerald asserts that 'Augustine's influence on Bonaventure can be viewed from two perspectives, as it were: 1) as a dominant shaping force in the inherited "deposit" of earlier theological reflection and biblical commentary that came to Bonaventure through his studies and duties as a master of theology; 2) as part of the reaction (Franciscan, generally) to the appearance of Aristotelian philosophy as an "authoritative source" in thirteenth-century theological discourse' (1999: 109).

by 1400, *Confessions* had risen ‘to new popularity’ (2005: 2). Augustine’s texts are also relevant to fourteenth-century Florentine definitions of the theological virtues because of the presence of the order of Augustinian Hermits (*Ordo eremitarum sancti Augustini*) who established themselves as a singular community in Florence (see Zumkeller, 1987: 63). As Dunlop notes, the Augustinians considered themselves ‘as the privileged heirs to Augustine of Hippo’s profound intellectual legacy. For the intellectuals of an order which defined its mission in the study of theology, this meant a full and profound engagement with Augustine’s work’ (2007: 12).² The Rule of Augustine—an amalgamation of Augustinian texts—was not only employed by the Augustinians, however. Many monastic communities (including the Dominicans, to a certain extent) throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries referred to Augustine’s letters and sermons in order to organise their communal practices (Gill 2005: 29-31). John Rist has argued that ‘the medieval Augustine is by no means the real Augustine, but a more homogenized figure’; although I suspect this might be an oversimplification, within *trecento* theological literature concerning faith, hope and charity, certain of Augustine’s philosophies are indeed well-defined and frequently referenced (Rist 2001: 3).

Thomas Aquinas’ writings also merit study for a number of reasons: first, Thomas was one of the most notable Dominican theologians of the time; by the *trecento*, Thomas’ *Summa Theologiae* was used as a standard text for mendicant universities. In terms of the laity, Thomas’ theology would have been made familiar by the Dominicans (one of the dominant orders in Florence), and his relatively recent canonisation would also have served to make his works more pertinent (Torrell 1996: 317-326). Thomas’ long-developed theological adaptations of Aristotle also played an integral role in the development of *trecento* Florentine intellectual and theological currents (Tugwell 1988: 18). Peter Lombard’s text *Sentences* is similarly important because of its widespread use within theological universities (Kerr 2001: 203). The *Sentences* became a standard text, because it ‘[gathered] into a single volume the views (*sententiae*) of the Fathers of the Church on the main topics in Christian doctrine’ (Kerr 2001: 203; see also Evans 2001: 97). Lastly, a few works of Bonaventure’s will be analysed in my discussion of faith, hope and charity.

² Gill notes that the order of the Augustinian Hermits was not the only ‘Augustinian’ order, and the claim to being the ‘true heirs’ of Augustine was quite a contentious one (2005: 2).

Bonaventure warrants analysis for two reasons: first, his role as a leader within the Franciscan Order meant that much of his scholastic theological work heavily informed Franciscan education throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Second, his meditational text *Lignum vitae*, further promoted the devotional model of *imitatio Christi* and in so doing, provided definitions of charity as being embodied by Christ. The impact of this text manifested in new artistic representations, but also in the proliferation of illuminated manuscripts that emulated Bonaventure's meditations on the life, and corporeality of Christ. The most well-known of these manuscripts in the fourteenth century, *Meditationes vitae Christi (MVC)*, will be discussed to indicate how charity was understood as being anchored in Christ's example. Altogether, the brief synthesis of these texts presented here will serve first, to demonstrate the principle importance of the virtue of charity within theological definitions of the theological virtues, and second, to explore the ways in which some of these texts emphasised an imitation of Christ as the primary means of expressing charity.

(i) *Peter Lombard's Sentences*

Peter Lombard's *Sentences* impacted scholastic theology in remarkable ways. Tracing the spread of Lombard's work, Colish writes that the *Sentences* took hold first in the 'cathedral schools of twelfth-century France and then in the theological faculties of university across Europe' (2001: 182).³ As the influence of the texts continued to spread, the *Sentences* served as the basis for the teachings of later theologians and thus, Colish argues, it 'did more than any other text to shape the discipline of medieval scholastic theology' (*ibid.*). The *Sentences* is a fruitful resource not only because it reveals Peter Lombard's own theology (and what he deemed appropriate for theologians to know), but it also details many works of the Church Fathers. In fact, Lombard's discussion of faith, hope and charity relies most fully on the works of Augustine. The following section then will provide not only a synopsis of what Lombard understood about the theological virtues, but also many of Augustine's definitions. Colish describes Lombard's discussion of the three virtues as rooted first and foremost in an interest in the nature of Christ's humanity (1994: 492). This

³ See Evans 2002, vol. 1; Rosemann 2010, vol. 2 for assessments of the impact, dissemination and doctrinal content of Lombard's work.

proves problematic for Lombard, however, because the virtues were understood as ‘correctives’ or divine ‘supplements’ to human nature and Christ, who was perceived to be perfect even in his humanity, would seem to be without a need for such additives. Colish suggests that whilst Lombard leaves this point of tension unresolved, the manner in which he attempts to approach the problem provides fruitful discussions of the virtues nonetheless. He begins by addressing the virtue of faith which was perceived by Lombard and indeed other contemporary theologians as an ‘epistemic state as well as a virtue’ (Colish 1994: 493). Faith is a type of knowledge according to Lombard, one specifically concerned with ‘religion’. He writes that,

Faith is the virtue by which unseen things are believed. And yet this is not to be taken of all things that are unseen, but only of those things which, as Augustine says, “it pertains to religion” to believe.

(*Sentences* 3, 23, 2.1)⁴

Faith, according to Lombard, is the virtue that enables us to believe with confidence in things that we cannot see or feel. It is not to suggest that all ‘invisible things’, or concepts may be believed through faith; rather, faith allows us to believe specifically in things which are of God (Colish 1994: 497-498).⁵ Faith (as a virtue) becomes possible, Lombard argues, because of the ways it intersects with charity: ‘[the] faith by which one believes, if it is joined to charity, is a virtue...faith working *through love* is the virtue by which unseen things are believed’ (*Sentences* 3, 23, 3.2). Although it is necessary for charity to infuse faith in order to make it a virtue, faith is, in some ways, the foundation of charity and, according to Lombard, it also provides substance to hope.⁶ He writes the following:

For the Apostle says: *Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence or conviction of things that do not appear*, because those things for which we are to hope subsist in us even now through faith, and they will subsist in the future through experience. And it is the proof and conviction of

⁴ In the translation referenced here (Lombard 2008), footnotes are provided to indicate the specific Augustinian text from which Peter quotes. I have reproduced those references throughout this section to give some indications of which of Augustine’s texts were most influential in the medieval conception of the theological virtues. For the reference given in the excerpt above: cf. *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide, spe, et caritas* (*Ench.*), 9.

⁵ Colish asserts that among the things Lombard lists that ‘pertain to religion’ are ‘the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation, and confidence in the trustworthiness of the person who proposes those propositions’ (1994: 498).

⁶ Colish characterises this particular assertion (that faith is the foundation of hope and charity) as ‘the consensus position’ amongst twelfth-century theologians (1994: 498).

things that do not appear because, if anyone should doubt concerning these, they are proven by faith, as even now the future resurrection is proven because the Patriarchs and other saints believed it to be so....But faith is properly called *the substance of things to be hoped for* because it 'stands under' the things to be hoped for, and because it is the foundation of good things and no one can change it.

(*Sentences* 3, 23, 8.1)

Lombard does admit that one may improve or develop faith through study or meditation, but without a true love of God, and full knowledge of the incarnation through Christ, even well-developed faith cannot be salvific without a love for God—or in other words, charity—and this realisation causes Lombard to revise his assertion that faith is the foundation of all other virtues. Instead, he concludes: '[and] yet it is not the foundation of charity, because faith is not the cause of charity; it is rather charity which is the cause of the virtue of faith itself' (*Sentences* 3, 23, 9.2).⁷ Faith, therefore, is a type of knowledge which, if exercised through love, allows one to believe in divine things which cannot be seen. Faith provides the substance of hope and where one must have faith in the past and present, experience of the divine will replace faith in the future. However, without the gift of charity—as it is perfectly manifested in Christ incarnate—faith is not a virtue. It must, therefore, be understood as dependent on, and perfected by, charity.

Peter Lombard's writing on hope is described by Colish as 'a thoroughly consensus position'; specifically, she argues that Lombard defines hope as 'the virtue through which Christians look with confidence toward the spiritual and eternal goods to come in their future beatitude' (1994: 499). Hope, like faith, has as its focus things which cannot be seen, however unlike faith, hope centres only on good things and only on things that occur in the future (*ibid.*). Of hope, Lombard writes, '[hope] is the virtue by which spiritual and eternal goods are hoped for, that is, they are awaited with trust' (*Sentences* 3, 26, 1.1). He goes on to acknowledge the common aspects between faith and hope:

Just like faith, so hope too concerns invisible things. Hence Augustine: 'We speak of faith with regard to those things which are not seen. Concerning hope too, it is said: *Hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he sees?*'

⁷ cf. *Tractatus in Ioannem* (*In Ioannem*) 8, 9.

Lombard discusses the differences between the two virtues by quoting Augustine at length. Augustine states that the differences manifest first in the way faith concerns both good and evil (*Sentences* 3, 26, 1.3).⁹ Further, the nature of temporality between faith and hope differs; faith is concerned with the past, present and future¹⁰ whereas hope centres solely on the things to come. Finally, Augustine argues that faith involves a concern for oneself and others which differs from hope which is a personal concern (*Sentences* 3, 26, 1.3).¹¹ Thus hope, as set forth in Book 3 of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, is the virtue which enables Christians to look with confidence towards the divine 'goods' that await them in their future union with God. Here, as before, Lombard ponders the possibility that Christ was also imbued with virtues like faith or hope. Lombard struggles with the paradox of suggesting that Christ was unknowing of God (and therefore needed faith), or that he was not already endowed with God's eternal blessing (and thus needed hope) (Colish 1994: 499-500). Lombard does not attempt to address this paradox and instead, leaves the question unanswered. However, as Colish notes, he does offer a caveat:

Peter...acknowledge[s] that the human Christ, in the light of His fullness of knowledge and grace, did not have faith and hope in the same way that other human beings can possess these virtues. But he insists firmly that Christ possessed the greatest possible degree of human charity, both in heart and deed.

(1994: 500)

Building on a discussion of the nature of Christ, Lombard begins to address the definition of charity. In reference to Christ, charity is an inextricable aspect of Christ's love for humanity, his sacrifice, and his success in saving humankind from sin (*ibid.*).

In a broader sense, Lombard defines charity as 'the love by which God is loved for his own sake, and our neighbour is loved for the sake of God or in God'

⁸ cf. *Ench.*, 8.

⁹ cf. *Ench.*, 8.

¹⁰ Lombard (quoting Augustine) gives the example of the events of Christ's life saying, '[and] so we believe in Christ's death, which has already occurred; we believe that he is enthroned, which occurs now; we believe that he will come to judge, which is future' (*Sentences* 3, 26, 1.3); cf. *Ench.*, 8.

¹¹ cf. *Ench.*, 8.

(*Sentences* 3, 27, 2.1).¹² Charity therefore has two discernible layers: one which relates to the love of God, and the other which centres on the love for neighbours (*Sentences* 3, 27, 2.2). Does this suggest that the love of God is the same type of love that is extended to neighbours? Lombard answers this by stating: '[the] love by which God and our neighbour are loved is certainly the same, and it is the Holy Spirit, as was said above, because *God is love*' (*Sentences* 3, 27, 3).¹³ Lombard suggests that the charity through which we love God and neighbour is the same, however because God is charity, and because we love for the sake of God, the virtue operates in such a way as to direct love in the appropriate order (Colish 1994: 502). Here again, Lombard quotes Augustine at length who defines four levels of love, from most important, to least:

'First, that which is above us, namely God; second, ourselves; third, that which is near us, namely our neighbour; fourth, that which is below us, namely the body. No precepts need to be given concerning the second and fourth of these,' namely that we love ourselves and our body. It is commanded that we love God and neighbour, 'but there is no need to command that each love himself.' 'However much a man may fall away from the truth, there remain in him love of himself and love of his own body,' because *no one has ever hated his own flesh*. Indeed, those righteous men who torture their body, 'do not hate their body, but its corruptions and burdensomeness.'

(*Sentences* 3, 28, 1.2)¹⁴

Charity must therefore be extended on what Colish describes as a 'sliding scale': first to God, second to our own souls, third to neighbours, and fourth to 'that which is below us', the body (1994: 502-503). Both Lombard and Augustine take pains to clarify that this hierarchy does not mean that one should hate the body; the whole human person is made up of both soul and body, hence charity must be extended to both. Nevertheless, the flesh should be loved least and last because it is precisely the flesh which prevents individuals from following the commandment to love God 'with all your soul'. Lombard writes:

And that precept is not wholly fulfilled by man in his mortal life, but only in part...Hence Augustine: 'While there still remains some concupiscence of the flesh, God is not wholly loved *with all your soul*. Yet the flesh is not said to lust, unless because the soul lusts carnally. *But when that which is perfect will come*, in order to destroy *what is only in part*, that is, that it may no longer be

¹² Colish argues that Lombard's definition here adheres to Augustine's (1994: 500).

¹³ cf. *Trin.* 8, 8, 12.

¹⁴ cf. *De doctrina christiana* (*Doctrina*) 1, 23-26.

in part, but wholly, then charity shall not be taken away, but it shall be increased and fulfilled’.

(*Sentences* 3, 27, 6.1)¹⁵

Several important elements arise in this passage from Lombard and Augustine. First, charity must be fulfilled by both body and soul, although it is ultimately only the soul which can determine the overall state of the believer. However, the mortality of the flesh ‘burdens’ the soul and causes charity to become partial and imperfect. The perfect fulfilment of charity, therefore, requires the destruction of the mortal flesh and salvation from sin such that it becomes possible to love God with a whole heart, a whole soul, etc. Lombard further clarifies the partiality and temporality of charity, which on the one hand, is like faith and hope in that it exists in human hearts only ‘in part’, but on the other hand, it is defined theologically ‘never to fail’ (*Sentences* 3, 31, 2.2). Charity is the only virtue of the three that exists both in the present and in the afterlife, although it is not static; where faith and hope will be replaced with knowledge and grace, charity will be perfected and expanded. Only through salvation and in perfect union with God will charity become whole and thus, will man’s love of God, of neighbour and of himself be truly fulfilled.

Lombard’s writing on the three theological virtues demonstrates several key points that are echoed in the other theological texts examined in this chapter. First and foremost, charity is defined as the greatest of the three virtues and the most perfect of the three because of the way it enables humanity to love rightly. Second, although Christ was without sin, he was nevertheless perceived to embody all three virtues perfectly, particularly charity which he exhibited in his very existence. Finally, according to Lombard, the theological virtues involved the whole human being—both soul and body—however, there was a clear hierarchy of participation so that mind and soul were affected by, and had a greater effect on the fulfilment of virtuous living than did the body and flesh.

(ii) *Thomas Aquinas*

Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* was, like Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*,¹⁶ one of the most influential theological texts in medieval Christianity.¹⁷ By the fourteenth

¹⁵ cf. *De perfectione iustitiae hominis* (*Perfection*) 8, 19.

century, Aquinas was undoubtedly the most well-known Dominican theologian in the Italian peninsula and his canonisation in 1323 solidified his 'presence' in *trecento* religious life. Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae* over many years and aside from the text acting as a contemplative outlet, Aquinas also used it to explore and expound the many philosophical texts of Aristotle (Kerr 2001: 203-204). In fact, Tugwell argues that the metaphysical nature of *ST* is in large part due to the contemporary need of theologians to 'cope theologically with the new, Aristotelian learning which posed a serious threat to orthodoxy' (1988: 18). Alongside his intellectual mentor, Albert the Great, Aquinas began the work of making Aristotle work for Christian thinking.¹⁸ Tugwell argues that 'Albert and Thomas espoused a radically intellectualist account of the Christian life. It is through the intellect that one is to be united with God, and the contemplative ascent to God is an intellectual process' (*ibid.*). Thus, through a three-part structure, *ST* attempts to explore metaphysical possibilities with specific reference to 'divine revelation'. Aquinas' discussion of the theological virtues in particular takes place in part two of *ST* where, according to Kerr, he addresses 'the movement of the rational creature towards God' (2001: 211). McDermott suggests that part of the impetus for Aquinas in discussing the theological virtues is to distinguish them from the 'moral or human' virtues (also called the 'moral virtues'). Whilst the moral virtues dispose human beings to 'serve the good', the theological virtues draw humanity into what McDermott calls a 'unity and identification with God himself' (1989: 325-326). The function of the theological virtues is unique therefore because it not only serves to highlight the good in humanity, but also the God in human existence (*ibid.*).

¹⁶ Like all theologians of his time, Aquinas was also influenced by Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and wrote his own commentary, although as Kerr points out, Aquinas 'interwove' his own considerations into Lombard's text (2001: 203).

¹⁷ Kerr suggests that *ST* did not become a dominant theological text until the sixteenth century, although he also admits that the timing and degree of impact is debatable (2001:203-210). For the purposes of my research, it is unnecessary to determine at what point *ST* became the primary theological text referenced in religious universities, only to note that it was, by the fourteenth century, already being read to some extent by Dominican scholars.

¹⁸ For further discussion of the relationship between Albert and Aquinas, and for biographical information more generally, see Tugwell 1988. For varied critical approaches to Aquinas' philosophical theology, see Davies 2005.

Aquinas begins in a similar way to Peter by first addressing the meaning of faith and also like Lombard, Aquinas asserts that faith is a 'disposition to know'.¹⁹ First, 'faith believes only things God has revealed: his truth guarantees their truth'; these include God himself, but also 'the works of God which help us to attain him: e.g. the manhood of Christ, the sacraments of the church, and creation itself' (*ST II*, 31, 1.1). Faith, according to Aquinas, does not concern 'what we see', however if 'the mind's assent' to belief is done with 'certainty and without doubt we call it *faith*' (*ST II*, 31, 1.4). Moreover, faith is neither knowledge nor opinion because opinion is tentative and knowledge 'sees'. Aquinas asserts that '[the] matters essential to faith are those directing us towards eternal life' (*ST II*, 31, 1.6). Faith, although it is an act of the mind, is not governed by reason Aquinas suggests, but rather by the will (*ST II*, 31, 2.2). We do not assent to faith only out of reason, but also from our will which compels us towards contact with God. Regarding human will Aquinas, like Lombard, interweaves his discussions of faith with both charity and hope. In relation to charity, Aquinas says of faith:

All human behaviour freely willed and directed towards God earns a reward, and believing is such a behaviour, mentally assenting to God's truth in obedience to a will activated by God's grace. Our natures are like matter that the love of charity (the source of all earning) gives life to; and faith is the final disposition which prepares nature for charity. So neither nature nor faith can earn without charity, but given charity, acts of faith and nature and natural free will all earn.

(*ST II*, 31, 2.9)

Here one may notice the influence of Aristotle's definitions of form and matter. Although 'natural' human bodies provide the matter of a believer, God's gift of the virtue of faith is what 'prepares nature' to be given form through charity. Here also we begin to see the ways Aquinas frames charity as the fundamental virtue of the three. Charity not only perfects faith, but it precedes it. Faith is also seen as lacking whereas charity fulfils. The way faith relates to hope however, echoes Lombard's assertions that faith provides the 'substance' of hope. Citing the New Testament

¹⁹ The translation referenced throughout the majority of this section is McDermott1989. McDermott's translation of Aquinas' discussion of faith, hope and charity begins with 'volume 31, article 1' on pp. 325 in chapter ten of the book. I have retained McDermott's use of volumes and articles here, however rather than indicating that these analyses take place in chapter ten of the *Concise Translation*, I have chosen to use a more traditional designation of *ST II* to indicate that Thomas' analyses of the three virtues takes place in the second part of *Summa Theologiæ*.

letter to the Hebrews, Aquinas writes that '*Faith is the substance of what we hope for, the evidence of what we cannot see*' (ST II, 31, 4.1). Also similar to Lombard, the definitions of faith as it intersects with charity and hope provided by Aquinas raise related questions about the order and importance of the virtues. Aquinas answers by asserting that '[there] are two kinds of order, one of generation and the other perfection' (1966: 123).²⁰ 'In the order of generation', Aquinas writes, 'where matter is prior to form and the imperfect to the perfect', faith, hope and charity follow one another respectively (*ibid.*). However in the order of perfection, 'charity precedes faith and hope in that both faith and hope are formed by charity and so acquire the perfection of virtue. Charity is thus the mother and root of all virtues insofar as it is the form of all virtues' (*ibid.*). Faith, then, is a mode of knowing. It concerns only those things which God reveals and those things which lead to humanity's eternal happiness. To have faith means to believe confidently in God's truth because of God's truthfulness. Faith is not only an intellectual exercise but also one of the will. Lastly, although faith provides the substance of hope, both are enlivened, perfected and made virtues by God's love, or charity.

Aquinas' discussion of hope sheds more light on the ways in which the three virtues are mutually interrelated and yet, how faith and hope are incomplete without charity. He begins by clarifying that human behaviour has two standards: 'reason at its own level, and God who surpasses it' (ST II, 33, 1). These standards relate to hope as follows:

Now the sort of things we hope for are future goods, challenging but possible of achievement either by our own power or with others' help; and in so far as we hope to achieve something by reliance on God's help, our hope embraces God. That makes hope a virtue, and the act of hoping good.

(ST II, 33, 17.1)

Hope, like believing, is a human behaviour that is made a virtue by embracing God. The object of hope further defines it as a theological virtue. Aquinas states that the primary 'good' we hope for 'from God is an unlimited good, matching his unlimited power to help; and that is eternal life, the enjoyment of God himself' (ST II, 33, 17.2).

²⁰ Here, I have chosen to briefly reference a translation by John Oesterle whose compilation focuses specifically on Aquinas' writings on virtues. Unlike McDermott, Oesterle retains Aquinas' characteristic question and answer format of which the three passages above are a direct result. The quotations above are from question 62, article 4.

Similar to faith, hope is an act of the mind, however it also responds to the senses and it has the future as its aim (*ST II*, 33, 18.1). Of course also similar to faith, Aquinas argues, is the fact that hope is imperfect. Even though hope ‘embraces the highest standard of human behaviour’ by having God as its ultimate goal, it—like faith—‘[embraces] him as a source of benefit to ourselves’ (*ST II*, 33, 17.5-6). Where faith believes in God in the pursuit of knowledge of the truth, hope relies on God’s help to achieve the ‘perfect good’. Only charity, Aquinas states, ‘embraces God for his own sake, uniting us to him spiritually in love’ (*ibid.*).

As was the case with Lombard’s *Sentences*, Aquinas’ explorations of hope elucidate the differences in temporality and importance between all three virtues. Aquinas explicitly ties both faith and hope to human existence; although the intellect or will (in the case of faith), and the pursuit of the good (in the case of hope) become the sites of virtue through God’s ‘supernatural’ gifts, they are still fundamentally human. Moreover, they are temporary states: upon being granted everlasting life, faith will be replaced by knowledge of God, and hope will be replaced by eternal bliss. Hope, Aquinas later suggests, is ‘a created disposition’ (*ST II*, 34, 23.2). Only charity is timeless and perfect, to love God for God’s sake, and to love others for the sake of God, are behaviours that unite humanity to God and that therefore do not dissolve in God’s presence.

Aquinas, like Lombard and Augustine, defines charity as the foundational theological virtue. According to Aquinas, charity is not simply love, but ‘God’s friendship’; the ‘love of charity’, he writes, ‘is a friendship’ (*ST II*, 34, 23.1). Aquinas affirms this basic definition by drawing on Aristotle who (Aquinas suggests) defines friendship thus:

...as the love with which we love those we will good things to distinguishing that from the love of desire we have for the good things so willed to ourselves....In addition, friendship must be mutual (friends are friends with friends): a mutual goodwill built on what we have in common.

(*ST II*, 34, 23.1)

Characteristically, Aquinas supplements Aristotle’s definition of friendship by turning the discussion towards God. Fellowship with God moves individuals to act by charity and so the love of God does in fact ‘spring’ from within people. Here, Aquinas contests Peter Lombard’s distinction that it is the Holy Spirit, ‘dwelling in our hearts’, which moves us to love God (*ST II*, 34, 23.2). Aquinas writes, ‘[we]

cannot love merely as tools of the Holy Spirit; tools in a sense cause action, but whether they act or not is out of their control, and so love would be neither voluntary nor deserving' (*ibid.*). Instead, Aquinas argues that in light of our 'natural inability to will' acts of charity, 'some other form' must incline us 'to love readily and with joy'; this form is God (*ibid.*). Aquinas continues by saying:

God...gives life to our souls by implanting charity, just as he gives life to our bodies by implanting soul. Charity acts in the sense in which forms act, with the effectiveness of the agent that implants them.

(*ST II, 34, 23.2*)

This process of implantation, Aquinas suggests, points to the ways individuals are joined to God through the form of charity; because of God's goodness, charity directs human behaviour towards its ultimate goal which is union with God himself. As a result, Aquinas asserts that charity is 'involved in every act of life, controlling even acts which are the immediate exercising of other virtues: *love is the goal of law*' (*ST II, 34, 23.3*). Charity is thus 'greater than all other virtues' (*ST II, 34, 23.6*) which is not to suggest that charity does not share certain characteristics with faith and hope, however. Like faith, charity is that 'which only our minds can know', it is 'a disposition of the will' (*ST II, 34, 24.1*). Charity is not a 'natural' disposition though, it is not knowable solely by human reason, but rather it 'is *the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge*, so measured not by reason in the way human virtue is, but by God's wisdom' (*ibid.*). Like hope, Aquinas says the 'goal of charity's growth is in the next life, not in this' (*ST II, 34, 24.8*). However even in this life, because of God's gift of grace, 'anyone who has charity is already perfect in this sense: that he has his whole heart so disposed to God that he does not think or will anything incompatible with God's love' (*ibid.*). Charity, also like faith and hope, is not static, it can intensify through zeal, or weaken through sin (charity may even be 'lost' if blocked by fatal sin), but ultimately, because God has instilled charity within the soul, it cannot fail (*ST II, 34, 24.10-12*).²¹

Aquinas agrees with Lombard by suggesting that love of God and love of neighbour are the same love by virtue of God's goodness (*ST II, 34, 25.2*). In our love for God we are even compelled to love our enemies because although they may

²¹ Aquinas gives the analogy that just as sunlight may be cut off by 'a single obstacle', so too charity may be 'lost' as a result of fatal sin. The implication however, is that the sun—even if blocked for the viewer—still exists (*ST II, 34, 24.12*).

‘displease us’, they are still ‘men, capable of eternal happiness’ (*ST II*, 34, 25.8-9). Nonetheless, Aquinas also institutes a sort of sliding scale of charitable love, although this he argues, is established through the use of reason. For Aquinas, ‘what charity loves is first God’ (*ST II*, 34, 26.2). Second, man should ‘love himself’ by which Aquinas means that in charity, man should love his soul, second to God (*ST II*, 34, 26.4). Third, man should love his ‘fellowmen, loved as fellow-sharers in that life’ (*ST II*, 34, 26.2). Lastly, man must show ‘the affection of charity’ to his own body, though again, Aquinas takes pains to affirm that before love of one’s own flesh, one ‘must love the souls of our fellowmen more’ (*ST II*, 34, 26.5-6). In summary, Aquinas writes that love shown through charity should be (in principal) equal for all, however it should be ‘distributed’ according to ‘closeness’ (see *ST II*, 34, 26.7). In Aquinas’ schema, what warrants the greatest good is proximity to God. On a personal level, we show charity to those who are closest to us. We do this because it is virtuousness which moves men closer to God. In all scenarios, what weighs heaviest and what elicits the greatest good is closeness to God (*ibid.*).

We can see, therefore, that Aquinas echoes many of Peter Lombard’s thoughts on charity: namely, that charity is the foundational virtue of all other virtues, and that it is the most perfect. Charity gives form to our soul like the soul gives form to the matter of our flesh. Charity is love which unifies humanity to God through a shared love of Jesus and of God’s goodness. Like faith, charity is known by the mind and it is implanted in the will, however it is not a ‘natural’ virtue, but rather one which is created through God’s grace. Charity compels us to love God for God’s sake, and our neighbours for God’s sake, and that love is one and the same. Nevertheless, in terms of human behaviour, charity is exercised in ways that favour those closest to God and thus it is reasonable to love in an ordered way. Of principal importance is the friendship with God we enjoy through charity; following love of God is love of one’s soul, love for one’s fellowman, and finally, things which are below that, including love for the body.

(iii) *Bonaventure & Meditationes vitae Christi*

The final texts I examine come from Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and a fourteenth-century author labelled Pseudo-Bonaventure. As a scholastic theologian,

Bonaventure was prolific similarly to Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas.²² His various positions within universities throughout his career meant that many of his writings were intended for Franciscan students (Robson 2001: 187). In fact, one of the texts that will be referenced in this section, the *Breviloquium (Brevil.)*, was compiled in response to student requests for guidance in studying the scriptures (Robson 2001: 190). As a scholar of theology himself, Bonaventure, like Thomas Aquinas, wrote his own commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences, Commentarius in I, II, III, IV librum Sententiarum (In Sent. I-IV)*, and in many ways, his definitions of the theological virtues maintain the status quo set by Lombard and confirmed by Bonaventure's contemporary, Aquinas. His definitions depart from Lombard's and Aquinas' in many subtle ways, a few of which bear noting here: first, Bonaventure argues that the four cardinal virtues, like the three theological virtues, are also infused into the soul by God, and that a virtuous life involves all seven virtues in conjunction with each other (Cullen 2006: 161). Bonaventure's discussions of faith also differ from those of Aquinas, for example, owing to Bonaventure's anxieties about the introduction of Aristotelian logic into theology (Robson 2001: 187).²³ His definitions of faith, therefore, are directed largely by his need to emphasise the primacy of theology over philosophy (Cullen 2006: 28).²⁴ This difference also manifested in the sources the two theologians drew on; where Aquinas relied heavily on Aristotle—Kerr notes that in Aquinas' *Sententiarum*, Aristotle is cited over 2000 times (2001: 203)—Bonaventure incorporated Augustine.²⁵ These variations notwithstanding, Bonaventure's commentary on the *Sentences* does not

²² The standard critical collection of Bonaventure's works is the Quaracchi edition (1882-1902). For his collected works in translation, see Bonaventure 1979-2010.

²³ Cullen notes that Bonaventure's relationship to Aristotle was complex and it is inaccurate to characterise Bonaventure's theology as strictly anti-Aristotelian (2006: 21).

²⁴ Cullen explains that for Bonaventure, '[theology] and philosophy are different ways of considering reality; hence, many things they consider are the same. However, while philosophy examines them under the light of reason, theology examines things under the light of faith' (2006: 28). Bonaventure's task, according to Cullen, was 'both to defend philosophy as a means to wisdom and also to subordinate it to theology' (*ibid.*). Cullen suggests that Bonaventure achieves this by arguing that philosophy cannot reach the 'Truth' without the help of 'a higher science'; the role of faith therefore, is to 'keep philosophy from error' (*ibid.*).

²⁵ Robson writes that '[the] bishop of Hippo is by far the most influential Father whom Bonaventure treats as an encyclopedic authority, citing him more than 3,050 times and pronouncing his *Confessions*, *De Trinitate*, *De Genesim ad litteram*, and *De civitate Dei* to be the finest expositions on time, matter, forms, the production of things, God, the soul, and the nature of creation' (2001: 189).

present any radical departures from the texts that have been explored above.²⁶ I have included Bonaventure's more 'scholastic' definitions of charity here, however, because of the ways these definitions would have contributed to Franciscan university education in the fourteenth century.²⁷ What is perhaps of more interest is Bonaventure's Christocentric model of spirituality and the ways it eventually proliferated in Florence during the *trecento*. In Bonaventure's scholastic theological text, *Brevil.*, one finds accepted theological definitions of the virtue of charity. In his meditational writings, however, Bonaventure explicitly placed Christ at the centre of meaning, and as the primary exemplar of lived charity.²⁸ According to Cousins, Bonaventure's meditation guide *Lignum vitae* (*LV*) is a treatise 'on the life of Christian virtue' as manifested in the 'concrete historical details of a human life', that of Christ (1978: 15).²⁹ The impact of *LV* during Bonaventure's lifetime was not comparable to that of some of his other later texts but, as Cousins explains, 'it had a significant influence on the 14th century' during which it inspired numerous adaptations in the form of manuscripts, and it 'stimulated a rich tradition in the visual arts' (*ibid.* 12). For fourteenth-century Florentines, the most familiar of these illuminated manuscripts was the *Meditationes vitae Christi*; a meditational guide that was so Bonaventurian in its approach that it was long-attributed to him (Goldschmidt 1969: 48). In this text, the author emphasises Christ's charity through his very body and especially his Passion; charity is not only understood as Christ's love for humanity, but also as rooted in his very flesh. This section will conclude then, with a brief look at how charity as manifested in Christ was explored in the fourteenth-century manuscript *MVC*.

The basis for Bonaventure's scholastic theology on charity mirrors quite closely the definitions given by the theologians discussed above. In common with

²⁶ Some attention will be paid to Bonaventure's commentary in the next section of this chapter, although with particular reference to his discussion of original sin and women's embodiment.

²⁷ Although Bonaventure's institutional influence in the thirteenth century was more marked, the work of Alexander of Alexandria (d. 1314) revived Bonaventure's presence within the Franciscan order during the fourteenth century (Cullen 2006: 21).

²⁸ In making this distinction, I am not suggesting that the two 'types' of theology do not inform and intersect with one another.

²⁹ More specifically, Cousins writes that '[the] meditations in Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae* cover Christ's life from his eternal generation by the Father, through his incarnation and birth, his public life and ministry, and his passion, resurrection, ascension, and his judgment and eternal life in heaven' (1987: 384).

Lombard and Aquinas, Bonaventure believed that the virtue of charity was foundational for all other virtues. Charity, for Bonaventure, provided necessary form and meaning; any virtue without charity could exist, but it would be without merit (Cullen 2006: 161). The importance of charity as ‘properly ordered’ love to Bonaventure cannot be understated; for him it is at the root of union with God and he reiterates the order of love as follows:

The proper order of loving is to love God first, more than all else and for His own sake; soul second, less than God but more than any temporal good; the neighbor third, as much as ourselves, as a good of the same degree; our body fourth, less than our soul, as a good of lesser degree. It is here also that we should place our neighbor’s body that, like our own, is a less good than our soul.

(*Brevil.* 8, 262a)³⁰

For Bonaventure this order was established by Christ in Matthew 11:20 (*Brevil.* 8, 261b). Bonaventure asserts that in essence, charity ‘loves him above all else as being the Beatifier, and loves as a consequence all other beings which through him are made fit for beatitude’ (*ibid.*). Charity is the very ‘force’ that enables this orderly love and subsequently, ‘the bond of perfect union’ (*Brevil.* 8, 262a). Bonaventure asserts that the ‘oneness’ which arises from humanity’s bond to God is the ultimate fulfilment of charity: ‘[with] this unity fully completed through the bond of love, God shall be “all in all” (1 Corinthians 15: 28) throughout an assured eternity and in perfect peace’ (*ibid.*). In line with definitions of charity espoused by other theologians like Lombard and Aquinas, Bonaventure posits that charity is the foundational virtue which imbues all other virtues with proper form. Further, it enables properly ordered love such that Christ’s commandment may be fulfilled to love God above all else. Charity as love must also be extended to one’s soul, one’s neighbour, and even to those things which are ‘of a lesser good’, like the body. The ultimate fulfilment of charity will manifest in eternity when the bond of love between God and humanity results in a perfect union. Whilst these parameters of charity are set by Bonaventure very much in line with established theological definitions, they do not represent the extent to which Bonaventure understood the virtue. In his *LV*, Bonaventure solidly situates all theological definitions of charity within the life of Christ, and more specifically, within Christ’s very embodiment. In

³⁰ The translations in this paragraph are from Bonaventure 1946.

imitation of Bonaventure's Christocentric *LV*, other meditation guides centred on Christ's humanity began circulating at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The most famous of these was *MVC*.

Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green noted that the '*Meditations*, given to Bonaventura and published among his works until the eighteenth century, continued to appear in the final volume of complete works of the saint even after the author was reduced to an unknown "Pseudo"-Bonaventura' (in Bonaventure 1961: xxi-xxii, n. 2). Goldschmidt has suggested that the attribution to Bonaventure, and then the subsequent use of Pseudo-Bonaventure, points to a certain disregard for the specific author because of the ways in which the text was more importantly conceived of as a 'typical product of the "New Devotion" belonging to the last years of the fourteenth century' (1969: 48).³¹ For the purposes of my discussion, the attribution of authorship is largely irrelevant. It is sufficient to note that the *MVC* was characteristic of Bonaventure's Christological theology³² and because of its generation and circulation during the *trecento*, the text is a fruitful source for examining the ways Florentines would have associated charity with the life and body of Christ. In the Prologue of *MVC*, the author assures the reader that she³³ 'will never find better instruction against vain and fleeting blandishments, against tribulation and adversity, against the temptations of enemies and vices, than in the life of Christ, which was without blemish and most perfect' (p. 2). The author goes on to ask the following:

Where can you find examples of teachings of charity, of great poverty, of faultless humility, of profound wisdom, of prayer, of meekness, obedience, and patience, and of all the virtues to equal those in the holy life of the Lord, full of all virtues?

(*MVC*, Prologue, p. 3)

³¹ On the debate about the text's authorship, see also See McNamer 2009: 905, n.1.

³² Karnes (2011: 141-145) provides further discussion about the similarities between Bonaventure's meditation texts and his successors.

³³ The text itself provides evidence for the fact that *MVC* was written for female consumption: on pp. 2-3 of the Prologue, the author writes '[if] you read about the Blessed Francis and the Blessed virgin Clara, your mother and leader...' and on p. 5, the text addresses itself to the reader by saying, 'dear daughter' (*MVC*, Prologue, p. 2-5). See also Karnes 2011: 144.

The answer: only in the life of Christ.³⁴ Thus, the purpose of the text is laid out and the reader is instructed to open her heart and mind in order to meditate on the example and lived experiences of Christ. The author discusses charity as it relates to—and is embodied by—Christ beginning with chapter 28 in which he retells the story of Mary Magdalene who washes Christ's feet (Luke 7: 38). In reference to this gospel, the author gives the following instructions to the reader:

Meditate with diligence and make an effort to imitate so much charity, which is here praised highly in word and deed by the Lord. Here you have especially the fact that charity establishes peace between God and the sinner. In this way the Blessed Peter says that charity covers the multitude of sins (I Peter iv. 8). Thus charity molds all virtues, and nothing pleased God without charity. To have it you must endeavour with all virtue to ingratiate yourself to your bridegroom Jesus Christ. I shall quote some passages on this. Thus the Blessed Bernard says of it in the 29th (sermon on the) Canticles, 'O how dear is charity, which is a quality that has no like and which the celestial Bridegroom took care to give continually to His new bride, saying, in truth, "By this all will know you as my disciples, that you love one another"'.
(MVC, 28, p. 173)

In this passage we can see both the more traditional theological definitions of charity, as well as Christocentric understandings of the virtue. In more 'scholastic' terms, charity is being defined as the virtue which is praised most highly by God and which establishes the bond between (sinful) humanity and God. Charity provides the form for all virtues and no right action can be deemed virtuous without charity. The discussion then moves on to the ways charity is interconnected with Christ. To obtain charity, one must bond with Christ and yet, according to Bernard of Clairvaux, charity is a gift from Christ to humanity so that they may share in his friendship, that they may be known by their relationship to him, and so that they may love their neighbours. Turning again to a more theological discussion of charity, the author writes of charity that it is the virtue

...without which it is truly impossible to please God but with which everyone pleases without question. Therefore learn to have it with all your heart, mind, and virtue, for it will cause you to bear willingly all hard and harsh things for the sake of God and for your neighbour.
(MVC, 28, p. 174)

³⁴ The author suggests that Francis is also an appropriate example to follow precisely because of his (bodily) adherence to the life of Christ (*MVC*, Prologue, p. 3).

Charity, then, is the virtue imbedded in the human will by God and is the bond between God and humanity. Nevertheless, if we do not embrace charity, no action is virtuous. Charity must be adopted entirely so that it becomes possible to love God for God and to love one's neighbours for God. In later chapters, definitions of charity become more explicitly anchored in the corporeality of Christ. The author writes that Jesus set an example of the virtue of charity 'in the consecration of His body (and His blood) and in the sermon, which is full of admonitions of charity' (*MVC*, 73, pp. 282). The emphasis here is twofold: charity exists in Christ's very flesh and blood as well as in the example of his life and in his words. The importance of Christ's body to conceptions of charity is further emphasised in the following chapter:

So greatly did He love the world that He gave His only Son to it (John iii, 16). The Lord Jesus receives this obedience and reverently carries it out. Thus also in the third place is shown the unutterable charity of the Father as well as of the Son, most sustained for us by their great charity.

(*MVC*, 75, p. 321)

Christ exhibits charity in his obedience to God and in his sacrificed body. Moreover, charity exists in the human soul, and is sustained therein, because of God's love for the world and because of the sacrifice of Christ.

Ultimately, it is the corporeality and the lived example of Christ that matters most for the author. Regardless of what other lessons are learned, the life of Christ is the cornerstone of proper meditation. In one of the final chapters, the author writes:

Therefore you ought to know that it is enough to meditate only on what the Lord did or on what happened concerning Him or on what is told according to the Gospel stories, feeling yourself present in those places as if the things were done in your presence, as it comes directly to your soul in thinking of them.

(*MVC*, 100, p. 387)

The reader of the *MVC* is reminded that a connection with Christ is formed through meditation on his life and on his bodily experiences. If she is unable to develop her virtue in any other way, the reader is assured that in centring her meditations on the life of Christ, and 'on what happened concerning Him', a unity will form between her soul and the life of Christ such that she will feel herself in his presence. In affirmation of this assertion, Karnes writes that the *MVC* 'explicitly connects Christ's incarnation to the human mind's never-ending ability to meditate on him, showing

that meditation is an extension of Christ's gift of himself in the incarnation' (2011: 144). Christ's charity therefore, is made evident not only in his incarnation but also in the connection established between himself and humanity. These selections from the *MVC* highlight both established theological definitions of charity, as well as the ways in which *trecento* Christians were instructed to understand charity as exemplified by, and manifested in, Christ.

The texts surveyed above provide some representative examples of theological definitions of virtues that informed *trecento* Florentine discourses and practices of charity. Although the theologians above do not discuss faith, hope and charity in anything other than 'universal' terms—whilst most of their language is in fact decidedly androcentric—further investigation of the ways men and women were defined differently within medieval theology points towards disparities. In the following section, I will analyse theological discussions of gendered bodies and then reflect on the ways these discussions referenced definitions of faith, hope and charity just surveyed. In light of the ways theologians like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure understood gendered bodies, I will assert that theological definitions of faith, hope and charity contributed to paradoxical discourses within which *trecento* Florentine women had, on the one hand, unmitigated access to the divine through charity, but on the other hand, were discursively positioned as farthest from salvation owing to the material nature of their embodiment, defined as imperfect, irrational and burdensome. Women's embodiments were also further subjected to 'supervision' and scrutiny by male authors of behavioural guides. Within these texts, women's 'natural' incapacity to embody the virtues was corrected by rigorous instruction concerning dress, bodily comportment, activity, tone of voice, etc. These guides demonstrate not only the ways in which *trecento* Florentine men were positioned as the normative Christian—whose duty it was to 'correct' aberrant women—but also the damaging ways in which women's bodies were materialised as incomplete and naturally incapable of true virtue. As a result of their discursive positioning, women's charitable activities were, at best, 'monitored' and at worst, erased by being credited to a male relative. Ultimately, I argue that these definitions of the virtues, and by extension, of the nature of men and women, are relevant to the ways in which gendered embodiment materialised. Following

from Butler, I assert that in their written production and reproduction, theological definitions of 'Man' and 'Woman' elicited the formation of normative discursive boundaries around the ways in which Florentine Christians could perform their gendered embodiments. These theological definitions of 'Man' as most normative, and 'Woman' as non-normative or aberrant, in their citation and recitation sedimented women's performative identities as imperfect, as damaged. Women's embodiments as damaged were, as I shall demonstrate, further crystalised by the production, circulation and recirculation of behavioural guides. Not only did these guides solidify normative definitions of 'Woman' as imperfect, but they caused further damage to women's embodied experiences insofar as they affirmed the necessity of curtailing women's independent charitable actions.

II. Gender and Charity in Text and Practice

The 'problem' of woman is one that frequently troubled theologians in the medieval church. Although patriarchal societal standards often made women's relative subordination and marginalisation non-negotiable, theologies of salvation provided (at least in principle) the promise of total equality in the afterlife. Making sense of the paradox that all were equal before God, but 'naturally' unequal in life was a task almost all theologians attempted to tackle at one time or another. The efforts made by the theologians already discussed vary but in common, they all approach gendered bodies in such a way that the male body is figured or implied as the norm and the female body as abnormal or deformed. Further, however hard these theologians tried to treat seriously women's potential for spiritual equality and perfection in the afterlife, almost all of their theological discussions of women's humanity relied fundamentally on the presumed imperfection, irrationality, incapacity and corruption of female corporeality. In reference to definitions of faith, hope and charity, women's virtuousness, like men's, seemed guaranteed by God's love. The unity shared between all of humanity and God exists in the charity of friendship which is implanted in the human soul by God's grace. However, when one takes into account theological definitions of the nature of woman (in comparison to the nature of man), specifically with reference to discussions of men and women as

imago Dei, it quickly becomes apparent that women are not *as* connected, or not connected to God in the same ways as men. This is explained by Augustine, Aquinas, Peter Lombard and Bonaventure, albeit each in different ways, as being the result of the imperfection of the female body. Furthermore, when one considers the 'right order' of the theological virtues, and the hierarchy of charitable love, one may see how women were theologically rendered as less capable of correctly embodying virtue. Even in devotional texts like the *MVC*, which was specifically addressed to a woman, encouraging her to align herself with Christ, introductory admonitions against 'vain and fleeting blandishments' and references to an unsteady intellect betray underlying assumptions about women's 'misbegotten' embodiment.

(i) *Theological Definitions of Man and Woman*

The relationship between many of the theologians mentioned here and real women is often an unsatisfactory source for any type of 'explanation' for the blatant misogyny that sometimes underpins their discussions of women. Whatever their individual circumstances many medieval theologians present, at best, what Clack has characterised as 'a rather ambivalent attitude towards women' (1999: 59). Augustine, for example, challenged many contemporary theologians who suggested that women were not made in the image of God (Clack 1999: 59). Theresa Tinkle has even suggested that in *Confessions*, Augustine 'troubles' categories of gender and 'invests feminine figures with spiritual power and authority' (2010: 2). Lloyd also points to the differences between Augustine's approach to women's embodiment and those of his contemporaries (1993: 28-29).³⁵ In Augustine's accounts of gendered bodies, therefore, we see the promise of spiritual equality essential to Christian theology. Nonetheless, despite Augustine's 'conscious upgrading of female

³⁵ More specifically, she argues that Augustine opposed interpretations of 'woman's inferior origins and subordination' as a result of 'her lesser rationality' because he saw 'them as inconsistent with Christian commitment to spiritual equality' (1993: 28-29). Similarly, Augustine rejected any suggestions that sexual differentiation (i.e. woman's very existence) was not intentionally part of God's plan for creation (1993: 28-29).

nature' (to borrow Lloyd's phrasing), women were still ultimately positioned in inferior, subordinate positions to men in his theology (*ibid.*).³⁶

This is perhaps most traceable in Augustine's discussions of the image of God. Augustine's bottom line in defining *imago Dei* is that human beings, both man and woman, are made in the image of God in the most superior part of the rational soul (Power 1995: 137). Here, there is no sex or gender; the rational soul is simply made in the image of God (*Trin.* 12, 3, 3). There are, however, two other demarcations that Augustine makes with regards to the 'rational soul': *Sapientia* (or Wisdom) is concerned with the knowledge of God and *Scientia* (Knowledge/skill) is concerned with the temporal world (Power 1995: 135). Power points out that grammatically, both of these terms are feminine, however in Augustine's account, *Sapientia* is masculine and *Scientia* is feminine (*ibid.*).³⁷ The masculine is defined by its capacity for wisdom and contemplation of the divine. The feminine is associated with the corporeal, the temporal, and with the things of the world. According to Augustine, these characteristics are not to be associated with biologically sexed bodies (Power 1995: 139). Curiously then, Augustine draws a parallel between *Sapientia* and *Scientia* and Adam and Eve in order to show how the latter is created to act as a helpmate for the former; just as Eve was created as a helper to Adam, *Scientia* helps *Sapientia* by dealing with the 'inferior' aspects of life in the world so that *Sapientia* may fulfil its purpose in contemplating the divine (*ibid.*). Despite the fact that both aspects are found in the mind, only *Sapientia* is the image of God in isolation, whilst *Scientia* may only be the image of God in conjunction with *Sapientia*. Again, Augustine uses an analogy of man and woman to explain:

[The] woman together with her own husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to her quality of help-meet, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.

(*Trin.* 12, 7, 10)

³⁶ On Augustine's conceptions of women see also Allen 1985: 218-235; Lloyd 1993: 28-34; Pagels 1988: 32-56; van Bavel 1990; Tinkle 2010: 49-74; Børresen 1995; Blamires 1992: 77-82.

³⁷ See Power 1995: 135-136 for discussion of Augustine's choice to ignore traditions in which Wisdom is characterised as feminine.

In this 'analogy', the woman is literally nothing without her husband; only in union with him does she become the image of God. Allen observes how Augustine substantiates this argument by drawing once again on Adam and Eve: he writes, '[if] the woman according to her own person completes the image of the Trinity why is the man called that image when she has been taken from his side?' (1985: 225).³⁸ The feminine is not only subordinate to the masculine then, but it is also entirely dependent on the masculine for existence. The masculine is the complete, perfect being from which the feminine gains any identity. Equally as important to Augustine was to suggest how these qualities were to be ordered (Allen 1985: 234). It was not simply that the feminine side of the mind was insufficient on its own to be the image of God, it was also in need of the masculine side of the mind for control and direction. Augustine writes that 'because too great a progression towards inferior things is dangerous to the rational dealing, that is conversant with things corporeal and temporal', and because the masculine side 'is so much the more formed after the image of God', the feminine 'ought to be restrained' by the masculine (*ibid.*). Again, we see a solid alignment between the masculine, rationality, and God; and between the feminine, the corporeal, and irrationality. The former represents the fully-formed and perfect, the latter represents the incomplete and dangerous. The pairing of these masculine and feminine elements was, according to Augustine, in the mind of both the man and the woman and in principle, it was possible for a woman to 'control' the feminine part of her mind and therefore, with the masculine portion, she could also be *imago Dei*. The question arises, however, how these 'allegorical' qualities of the mind affected Augustine's conceptions of real men and women. Power suggests that despite Augustine's argument that *Sapientia* and *Scientia* were 'totally severed from any connotation of biological sex', his repeated use of the example of Adam and Eve, tied 'them to social gender which was definitely tied to biological sex' (1995: 140). Prudence Allen echoes Power's assessment of Augustine saying that he 'makes a similar distinction to the one previously made by Aristotle, namely that a woman has a special relation to the lower functions of reason and man to the higher' (1985: 230). She points to a particular passage in the *Confessions* which she suggests is 'one of the most pronounced' examples of Augustine's belief that women are subordinate. Augustine writes the following:

³⁸ cf. *De Trinitate* (*Trin.*) 12, 7.

And just as in man's soul there are two forces, one which is dominant because it deliberates and one which obeys because it is subject to such guidance, in the same way, in the physical sense, woman has been made for man. In her mind and in her rational intelligence she has a nature the equal of man's, but in sex she is physically subject to him in the same way as our natural impulses need to be subjected to the reasoning power of the mind.

(*Confessions* 13, 32)³⁹

Thus, in considering women's spirituality, it is not only the masculine portion of her mind which determines her (in)capability, but also her 'sex'. Indeed it is woman's sex which renders her as not-*imago Dei*. Augustine suggests that women are not entirely excluded from grace and salvation, 'although, in their corporeal sex, it is figured otherwise, in the sense that it is said that man only is the image and glory of God' (*De Genesis* 11, xlii, 58).⁴⁰ Here Augustine confirms that man is the normative ideal, the one who is most in the image of God, whereas woman is aberrant specifically because of her corporeality; she is *imago Dei* only in a select part of her mind that will, *in the afterlife*, define her existence more than her flesh. Further regarding the female sex in particular, Augustine has two things to say; the first is related to the ways in which woman is supposed to be understood as man's 'helpmate'. By examining other Augustinian writings, Power concludes that the meaning of woman as helpmate for Augustine does not point to companionship or partnership, but instead, has a specifically procreative meaning. Woman is neither co-worker, nor companion; she is not an authority or a friend; finding no other logical answer, Augustine concludes that woman is a helper to man for 'the sake of bearing children' (Power 1995: 150).⁴¹ Power summarises Augustine's perception of woman by saying the following:

Although equal as *homo*, woman is subordinate as *femina* (i.e. non-*vir*) because she was created second and her subordinate status is reinforced because she was made from man. Like the feminine, as *adiutor* ['helpmate'] she is essentially passive, that is, not in control of her life, her emotions and her actions. Passive does not necessarily connote lack of activity but being subject to feelings and to authority beyond the control of the self.

(1995: 150)⁴²

³⁹ Translation in Allen 1985: 230.

⁴⁰ Translation in Allen 1985: 222.

⁴¹ Power notes that Augustine goes so far as to compare woman 'to the earth which nurtures the seed of the plants'; an appropriately passive and powerless metaphor (1995: 150). Allen also confirms this conclusion (1985: 225).

⁴² See Power 1995: 140 on Augustine's use of the term '*adiutor*'.

Related to Augustine's conceptions of woman as subject to feelings 'beyond the control of the self' are his discussions of women's flesh as the locus of sexual temptation. Through various connections made again between the feminine *Scientia* and Eve, Augustine argues that a 'love of independence' and an excess of pride will cause the feminine aspect of mind to slip away from God, just as Eve, out of an overwhelming love of self, took the fruit from the serpent and seduced Adam (Power 1995: 146).⁴³ He concedes that to truly sin, it requires both aspects of the mind (because only the *Sapientia* is really in control) and by extension, the body does not fall into sin without the consent of the soul (*ibid.*, 147). Nevertheless, the mapping on of *Scientia*/Eve as temptress to all women's bodies is an easy transition for Augustine. As Allen points out, Augustine situates temptation solidly in the body of woman, not in the sense that he believed they had the power to make men act against their wills, but that women's bodies were what 'drew man away from a spiritually oriented existence' (1985: 233).⁴⁴ Ultimately, Augustine serves as one example of the complex ways theologians wrestled with the 'radical' equality of Christian theology in the face of well-established androcentric, and at times misogynistic, definitions of women's corporeal identities. Augustine's allegorical rendering of the feminine, and of female characters, may have in some instances inverted previously-held misogynistic definitions of woman, but in terms of the practical application of theology, much of Augustine's work upheld man as the idealised norm and woman as the dependent, incomplete other. In spite of the potential for spiritual equality, and equal access to God as proposed by the virtue of charity, women's bodies were defined consistently as being base, out of control, dangerous, in need of authority, and as the seat of temptation. Just as Augustine's definitions of the theological virtues were adapted and reproduced in later

⁴³ Power states that through these connections, 'the feminine, and the female sex, are linguistically identified with the dubious nature of sexual desire and its proximity to sin, especially if it/she gains the "upper hand"' (1995: 145).

⁴⁴ Allen cites a passage from *Soliloquies* in which Augustine converses with 'REASON' who encourages him to take an intelligent, obedient wife. Augustine responds by saying, '[no] matter how much you choose to portray and endow her with all good qualities, I have decided that there is nothing I should avoid so much as marriage. I know nothing which brings a manly mind down from the heights more than a woman's caresses and that joining of bodies without which one cannot have a wife' (1985: 233).

scholastic theologies, so too his understandings of man and woman were reiterated throughout medieval Christendom.

The bulk of Augustine's assumptions about women's embodiment was not innovative, of course, largely informed by classical and Patristic Graeco-Roman philosophies (Power 1995: 30-42).⁴⁵ It is no surprise therefore that for theologians like Aquinas and Bonaventure, combining newly rediscovered classical philosophy with Augustine's theology was a natural process when discussing men's and women's corporealities (McLaughlin 1974: 215-216).⁴⁶ In addition to Augustine's assertions that women were formed in the image of God, just not as fully, the thirteenth-century theologians also frequently referenced Aristotle's natural philosophies to explain the necessary and natural subordination of women.⁴⁷ Aquinas followed Augustine closely in many ways: he believed that the human being was both body and soul; he asserted that the ultimate good (union with God) was achieved by 'the rational soul'; and nonetheless held that both men and women were created in the image of God (*ibid.*, 216-218). In terms more specifically related to men's and women's embodiment, Aquinas also concurred with Augustine in his belief that the man was *imago Dei* in a way superior to woman (*ibid.* 218). He writes:

Since man is said to be after God's image in virtue of his intelligent nature, it follows that he is most completely after God's image in that point in which such a nature can most completely imitate God.

(*ST Ia.* 93, 4)⁴⁸

Woman, although made less perfectly in the image of God, is nonetheless an integral part of God's plan because of the role she plays as a helper. Again echoing Augustine, Aquinas states that Scripture describes woman's role as helper in purely procreative terms (*ST Ia.* 92, 1). However with this argument, he also begins to draw heavily on Aristotle and where Augustine tried (somewhat awkwardly) to keep the potential

⁴⁵ Lloyd clarifies that Augustine's works were mostly informed by Plato (1993: 34).

⁴⁶ Peter Lombard will largely be left out of this discussion because as Allen notes, at the time of his writing, 'most of the works of Aristotle had [not] been translated into Latin, he did not refer to the philosopher' (1985: 425). Moreover, the majority of what Lombard had to say was repeated from Augustine and Anselm such that '[man] became the preferred representative of the image of God through his primary creation' (*ibid.*, 425-426).

⁴⁷ Even Bonaventure, who proved to be less inclined to adapt Aristotle, builds into his commentary a definition of woman as weak and less perfect. I shall return to this point shortly.

⁴⁸ From Thomas Aquinas 1964.

for men's and women's embodied equality in the frame, Aquinas—through Aristotle—flatly rejects it. First, in spite of her role as procreator, woman is not attributed with any power to create; in fact Aquinas takes pains to avoid any insinuations that women were responsible for the essence of creation.⁴⁹ As Allen notes, Aquinas believed that the male was superior to the female not only because of 'having a closer approximation to the actuality of God', but also because of 'his more perfect generation and his capacity for providing principle or act to his offspring' (1985: 389). Building on Aristotelian theories of reproduction, Aquinas writes: '[in] the higher animals brought into being through coitus, the active power resides in the male's semen, as Aristotle says, while the material of the fetus is supplied by the female' (*ST Ia*. 118, 1).⁵⁰ The man's semen provided the form necessary to make the matter in a woman's womb into a human being. Thus, Aquinas argued that basic matter was provided by woman, man provided the essence or 'soul power', and God provided the 'rational soul' (Allen 1985: 394). The implications for woman were that her body was more tightly bound to procreative functioning⁵¹ and that in the natural order of generation, she was a passive recipient, dependent on the superior essence of the man (see Lloyd 1993: 37; McLaughlin 1974: 218). According to Aquinas, the combination of active and passive was essential to procreation and in no uncertain terms, active related to man while passive related to woman (Allen 1985: 395). The active male was so representative of the normative ideal for Aquinas that he went so far as to transmit Aristotle's argument that women were 'misbegotten men'. Of the appearance of women in the face of the 'perfection' of the male principle, Aquinas writes:

The active principle in the male seed always tends towards the generation of a male offspring, which is more perfect than the female. From this it follows that conception of a female offspring is something of an accident in the order of nature—insofar as it is not the result of the natural causality of the particular agent.

(*De Veritate* V, 9)⁵²

⁴⁹ This was fueled at least in part by the need to reject of Galenic theories of reproduction.

⁵⁰ In Allen 1985: 393. Also on woman's passivity and equation with 'matter', see Blamires 1992: 47.

⁵¹ Lloyd writes of Aquinas' conception of woman: 'her meaning is bound up with the reproduction of human nature, in distinction from those operations—including noble intellectual functioning—which define what human nature *is*' (1993: 36).

⁵² This translation of *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* (*De Veritate*) is listed in the Bibliography as Thomas Aquinas 1952.

Aquinas is careful to stress that it is not God's plan which is somehow 'less perfect' (or even the male sperm); rather woman exists by some kind of malfunction in the execution of the perfect plan (*ST Ia*. 92, 1). McLaughlin describes Aquinas' explanation as follows: 'the girl child represents a defective human being, the result of an accident to the male sperm, which was thought to contain the complete human being *in potentia* and to reproduce by nature the likeness of its origin, that is, another male' (1974: 217).⁵³ In conjunction with this accidental, imperfect body, women's intelligence is also affected (McLaughlin 1974: 218; Allen 1985: 402). Citing Genesis, Aquinas distinguishes between 'vital functioning' and 'generation': in everything created, there is a vital function or essence, and less nobly there is also generation (Lloyd 1993: 35-36) and asserts that the first man, the principle of humanity, symbolizes the vital function, the intellect, Reason. Woman, who was created separately, represents generation (something we know from Scriptures) (*ibid.*). This is not to say, however, that woman is without intellect or reason, but because of her role as procreative 'helpmate', she does not represent the principle or vital function and thus her intellect is weaker, less perfect.⁵⁴ In addition to establishing women's inferior intellectual powers, Aquinas' argument has further ramifications for women. By linking women to the first woman, Eve, Thomas also affirms women's natural subordination to men. Not only did Adam represent the principle or essence of humanity, and Eve the auxiliary generation, but Adam's role as head is also 'natural' insofar as he provided the substance from which Eve was created (McLaughlin 1974: 217). Therefore it is natural for women to be subordinated to men, not because of sin—all of the reasons listed above are pre-Fall—but because of the order of creation. Aquinas argues that this does not make woman a slave; rather her subordination is for the good of all humankind. Of this particular type of subjection, Aquinas writes that it is 'domestic or civil, in which the ruler manages his subjects for their advantage and benefit'; without it, the whole of

⁵³ See also Allen (1985: 395-396) for discussion of Aquinas' Aristotelian theories of potentiality and actuality with reference to generation.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, building more explicitly on Aristotle, also attributes women's weaker intelligence to her 'changeableness': Allen quotes Aquinas as saying that because 'woman is free, she has the capacity for understanding but her capacity is weak. The reason for this is on account of the changeableness of nature, her reason weakly adheres to plans, but quickly is removed from them because of emotions, for example, of desire, or anger, or fear, or something else of the kind' (1985: 399).

humanity would have been deprived of order established by those 'who were wiser' (*ST Ia*. 92, 1). 'Such is the subjection in which woman is by nature subordinate to man' Aquinas concludes, 'because the power of rational discernment is by nature stronger in man' (*ibid.*).

In Aquinas' discussions of gendered bodies, woman's body becomes her defining attribute; her corporeality is accidental and therefore inferior and God's intentions for her can be described solely in terms of her passive role in procreation. Woman has the capacity for intelligence, and in this way, she too is made in the image of God. However her corporeality, her flawed 'changeable' humanity, drags her down to a less perfect, subordinate position. Moreover, although it is not the sum of what he is, man's body is defined as active and more perfect. Aquinas achieves this conclusion not only by virtue of Aristotle's philosophy but also by pointing towards Christ's maleness. As McLaughlin writes, for Aquinas, '[the maleness of the first human being, Adam, is underlined by the maleness of the Second Adam and Redeemer' (1974: 220). As such, Aquinas seamlessly aligns Christ's 'human perfection' with the male body (*ibid.*). Hence, it is naturally men, who are God's potentiality actually realised; they are fit to leadership and wisdom and their active capacity for creation gives vital form to all new life. Accordingly, whatever equality woman might share with man, it is strictly precluded from the temporal world not only by God's intentions, but also by the forces of nature.

In almost total agreement with Aquinas,⁵⁵ Bonaventure also defined men's and women's bodies in these ways in his commentary on the *Sentences*. For Bonaventure, the image of God resides, in principle, in the soul of both men and women. However, owing to the natural difference in the order and disposition of bodies, the image of God is more fully represented in the man who is the head of the woman and her source of generation (Allen 1985: 426). Also similar to Aquinas, Bonaventure states that man and woman symbolise the higher and lower faculties of reason, respectively. Man is stronger and has higher reason than woman, who is weak and who has only the lower faculties of intellect; therefore, after Adam and Eve, man is the principle of humanity and is the rightful ruler of woman (*ibid.*).

⁵⁵ Allen points out that Bonaventure's 'seed theory' departs somewhat from Aquinas' but ultimately, it confirms Aristotle's assertions that man provides the form and woman the matter; man is the active agent and woman the passive (1985: 428).

Further, although he relies more heavily on Augustine, Bonaventure too combines Aristotle's theories of gendered bodies in his theological discussions. Addressing Aristotle's assertions that women are defective men, Bonaventure writes:

To the first objection that says that woman is a defective man we must reply that Aristotle did not mean that woman is beyond the intention of nature, but that the power of nature has some defect in producing a woman compared with the production of man. But the defect is not contrary to the order of nature, but rather preserves that order. For according to the order of nature, in the same body some members are stronger and some are weaker. In the same way in the same species there are produced some individuals of one sex and others of the other.

*(In Sent. II, 20, 1, 6)*⁵⁶

What is natural, then, is reflected in the man and the woman, both of whom are intended to appear in nature, although the former is clearly superior to the latter. Again, in conjunction with both Augustine and Aquinas, Bonaventure makes a sharp distinction between the theoretical spiritual equality between men and women and the ways in which their embodiment skews the earthly possibility of that equality. Women are not strictly prohibited from salvation—it would be heterodox to suggest such a thing—and in light of the creation story in Genesis, it was impossible to maintain that woman was not God's intended creation. Nevertheless, through combining theology with natural philosophies, theologians like Augustine, Aquinas and Bonaventure iterated and reiterated definitions of women's embodiment as imperfect, defective, weak, irrational, emotional, and procreative. Simultaneously, male embodiment materialised as the actuality of God's perfect intentions, as the principle of humanity, the locus of strength and intellect, the necessary ruler of woman, the provider of form, and as more perfect because of an approximation to Christ. Whatever else might be true of 'Woman'—i.e. that she was created by God, that she is spiritually equal, etc.—the bottom line for these theologians was that her spiritual embodiment was first and foremost defined in terms of its fleshiness, its imperfection. All other characteristics belonging to women were understood as anchored in and inextricable from the damaged female body. Bearing these distinctions in mind, I will now return to examine their relationship to the theological virtues outlined previously.

⁵⁶ Translation in Allen 1985: 427.

(ii) *Gender and Virtues*

The disparity between theological definitions of men's and women's modes of spiritual embodiment in principle and in practice—in heaven or on earth—begs the question of how universal are the definitions of the virtues. Similar to the reluctance to deny women spiritual equality, the theologians here seem to frame the virtues in ways that suggest equal opportunity. However, both Augustine and Aquinas preclude that possibility with their specific assessments of women's capacity for virtuous behaviour. Moreover, the definitions of the virtues themselves privilege the normative male ideal and degrade all those (embodied) characteristics so emphatically attached to woman. According to Augustine the virtue of faith is received by the feminine portion of the mind (*Scientia*). Given the foundational nature of faith, and Augustine's inclination to elide the distinction between the feminine and the female, this assertion has the potential to associate women with virtue. The realisation of that potential is prohibited however, in two ways: first, as Power notes, although Augustine argues that faith belongs to the realm of *Scientia*, 'he does not explicitly identify faith with feminine symbols or imagery as he does other characteristics, so it is not self-evident that faith is a feminine attribute' (1995: 143). Second, Augustine's assignment of faith to the 'temporal sphere' of the mind points towards the ways faith dissolves in eternity. Although faith is instrumental in reaching the ultimate good, it is not, in fact, a part of humanity's perfect union with God (which is solely expressed through charity). In this way, faith is 'fittingly' feminine insofar as it relates to worldly things, and it plays an auxiliary role to love which, consequently, belongs in the realm of *Sapientia*. Power states, that in Augustine's classification of the mind, 'love cannot be received directly by *Scientia*, but must be mediated by *Sapientia*. Although the good works of *Scientia* are directed towards God, only *Sapientia* reaches towards God immediately' (1995: 144). Given what we know about Augustine's associations of *Sapientia* and *Scientia* with man and woman, we can begin to see how woman's virtue is deemed less impactful to man's. A parallel is established between faith and woman: despite the fact that woman plays an integral role in creation, she is firmly rooted in this world, she is dependent on man, and she cannot reach God but through man.

Woman's corporeality also poses a problem in Augustine's conception of virtue. According to Allen, Augustine sees no reason why women cannot be as virtuous as men as is evidenced by his belief in the perfection of both male and female saints. Augustine also seemed to believe that Eve, before the Fall, possessed perfectly all the virtues that were appropriate to her. However, Augustine's exploration of virtue in the world betrays certain assumptions about women's capacity for virtue. Allen argues that the concept of free will for Augustine is universally applicable and that he encouraged (religious) women to exercise free will to the same extent as men (*ibid.*). However, if that will is to be exercised to its full extent by religious women, they must first and foremost invest in the denial of their bodies through celibacy (*ibid.*, 233). For Augustine, Allen states, 'bodily desires [are] enemies to be overcome', and as demonstrated above, women are chiefly ruled by their bodies. Therefore, if a woman is to become truly virtuous, she must deny her body and by extension, deny the very thing which theologically defines her as woman (Power 1995: 166).⁵⁷ What begins to materialise through these paradoxes in Augustine's theology is the impossibility for real women *qua* women to achieve virtue in the same meaningful ways as men. In Augustine's reckoning, the salvific power of faith, hope and charity for women, then, is 'veiled' by her inescapable materiality.

Aquinas similarly assumes the degradation of human women (on earth) in his writings on virtue. In discussing the manner in which human beings will be resurrected, he maintains that bodies will still be sexed (because biological sex was not an accident) but that there will be no qualitative difference between male and female although:

Woman is subject to man on account of the frailty of nature, as regards both vigor of soul and strength of body. After the resurrection, however, the difference in those points will be not on account of the difference of sex, but by reason of the difference of merits.

⁵⁷ Here again it is helpful to draw on Salih's analysis of concepts of virginity; whereas Augustine's chastity was but one element of his sanctity and devoutness, religious women's virginity was their defining characteristic, i.e. it was that which made them 'religious'. Salih writes that even when men were approvingly described as 'chaste or virginal...their sexual status [was] rarely the locus of their sanctity, as [was] often the case for women' (2001: 17). I argue that the overwhelming focus on women's virginity (in order to establish their piety) is the result of theological definitions of women's embodiment as defective and thus, only in negating aspects of their embodiments (like their sexualities, for example) could women hope to achieve relative sanctity to men.

Hypothetically, Aquinas suggests that women *qua* women after the resurrection will be equal to men and whatever differences manifest will be a result of merit, rather than a result of corporeal disparities. For human women, this virtually amounts to an afterlife which exactly mirrors the temporal world. Women are perceived by Aquinas as being frailer than men not only in their bodies but also in the ‘vigour of soul’. Further, as Allen points out, on earth, ‘man by nature rules because he is the “perfect sex”’ (1985: 404). The implications here are that women, who are ruled by their flesh, weaker in soul, and imperfect in life stand little to no chance of reaching the same level of spiritual merit as men who are already made ‘perfectly’. Thus, regardless of how virtuous a woman might endeavour to be, according to Aquinas, she will inevitably fall short of man whose merits will be greater owing to his natural perfection. With respect to the virtue of charity in particular, McLaughlin demonstrates how Aquinas’ alignment of women with Eve taints women’s charitable love of neighbour. According to Aquinas, McLaughlin states, Eve’s role in the fall of humanity was ‘instrumental but not decisive’ primarily because of her ‘inferior reasoning abilities’ (1974: 219). In other words, Aquinas felt that Adam was more responsible because he was ‘smart enough to know better’. However, as McLaughlin explains, ‘Thomas argues that Eve’s pride was more serious, her sin more grave, for she actually believed the snake, and she sinned against her neighbor as well as God in occasioning Adam’s fall’ (*ibid.*). In the first woman, we see not only inferior intellect, excessive pride and the need for governance but also a fundamental failure at charity on two levels: a failure to love one’s neighbour and a failure to love God. Returning to Allen’s earlier point, we see how for Aquinas, women would simply never exist on the same plane with men. Even in the afterlife where a disparity of merits is the ‘only’ thing which determines the level of perfection, women, as the daughters of Eve—who damaged her connection with God through her failure to properly love—are always already positioned as less perfect. Virtue for Aquinas simply cannot be thought of in the same way with respect to women who are dis-abled by their very modes of embodiment.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The majority of Allen’s analysis of Aquinas’ views on gender and virtue centre on the cardinal or moral virtues which Aquinas clearly found women particularly unable to pursue.

Even in the definitions of the virtues themselves we see how women's embodiments are marginalised and degraded. Faith is defined as a method of knowing, it is an act of the intellect and it is situated in the will. On the one hand, as we have seen with Augustine, this seems to be positive for women who he deems to have free will and to be concerned with the temporal, as is faith. However, for women, whose intellects were defined as inferior and whose bodies clouded their wills, it is difficult to see how they might have been perceived of as equally as capable of faith to men. Hope becomes sadly dimmed when it is approached from a woman's perspective. Hope is the vision of spiritual goods which await in eternity; for women we understand that the quality of these goods is determined by merits which she can never hope to earn on the same level as her male counterpart. Finally, in charity we see how men are firmly positioned not only as the ideal practitioners but also as the necessary supervisors of women's charity. Charity is what we share in common with God, it is a bond of friendship established in the soul by the union God shares with humanity by making them in his image. The charitable love between God and man must necessarily be greater by virtue of man being more perfectly in the image of God, closer to God in intellect. Charity also commands that one must love God with all one's heart, and as Augustine pointed out, that cannot be perfectly achieved when the heart still lusts because of the flesh. For women, whose very bodies represented for Augustine concupiscence, charitable love is increasingly imperfect. Charity also instils in us the right order of loving so that proper love is given first to God, then to self, to neighbour and lastly, to the body. Here we can see how women, who are not capable of properly ordering themselves, must cleave to man in order to practice charity. Moreover, the ways in which women are ruled by their bodies creates a troubling tension between the right order of love and the disorder in which women exist corporeally. Finally, theologians like Lombard and Aquinas specified that activities of charity—like giving alms—should also be appropriately ordered such that giving 'spiritual alms' was a much greater act of charity than giving physical alms or donations of food. Clearly women's charity

When Allen finally turns to a specific consideration of the theological virtues, she only concludes that Aquinas alleges equality and as support, she points to the fact that he celebrated the Virgin Mary and recognised female saints (1985: 407). Suffice it to say, I find this an unsatisfactory defence of Aquinas' belief in equality as neither point of 'evidence' deals with temporal, human women and their capacity to embody faith, hope and charity.

according to this scheme would always fall into the least meaningful level as they were categorically prohibited from filling ecclesiastical offices and often had at their disposal only material goods to give. The theological virtues therefore, present another example of the paradox inherent in Christianity wherein spiritual equality is not only promised but imbedded in humanity by God's grace, whilst the disparity between the natures of men's and women's bodies meant that the capacity to embody these virtues was achieved most perfectly by men and incompletely by women. The response to this virtuous disparity in *trecento* Florence was largely manifested in two ways: one, it resulted in a proliferation of conduct guides for women, written by men whose spiritual duty it was to supervise and instruct women in properly embodying and practicing virtue. Second, women's acts of charity were curtailed, supervised, delimited according to what was considered appropriate, and sometimes, erased under the auspices of 'family honour'.

(iii) *Women's Virtues & Charitable Practices in Florence*

Theologians were not the only men to deal with the 'danger' of the deformed female body in *trecento* Florence. Behavioural guides, or conduct guides, were written by secular and religious men alike, all concerned with the ways in which women's embodiment failed to exhibit right virtue.⁵⁹ Authors like Francesco of Barberino, and later Leon Battista Alberti,⁶⁰ set about compiling texts which not only explained the nature and variety of women, but also expounded precisely how women's embodiment should materialise when properly ordered (Casagrande 1992: 70). Francesco of Barberino (d. 1346) was a Tuscan jurist trained in moral philosophy and law (Allen 2002: 668). His book *Del reggimento e costume di donna* (*Del reggimento*), written sometime between 1318 and 1320, was written in the Tuscan vernacular in a 'simple' style that he deemed would be accessible to upper-class women (*ibid.*, 669). The impetus for *Del reggimento* Francesco claimed was to address the need to educate women; by educate, however, Francesco was not so

⁵⁹ See Khan 2004:109-135 for a discussion of 'behavioural' preaching in fifteenth-century Florence.

⁶⁰ While Alberti (d. 1472) does not fit into this discussion of *trecento* women, his own interpretation of the conduct guide, *Della famiglia*, carries on in the tradition of texts like Francesco's and had a remarkable impact on fifteenth-century Florentines (Allen 2002: 789-830). See also Gadol 1969; Stein 1996: 129-236; Woodward 1967: 48-64.

much concerned with providing a reading list of philosophy.⁶¹ Rather, Francesco divided the text into what he perceived to be the twenty stages of a woman's life⁶² and throughout, personified virtues, that varied based on the 'phase' of woman, spoke to the reader about the ways in which she should comport herself.

Casagrande rightly notes that Francesco's treatise was 'not a neutral description...[*Del reggimento*] presented a much-debated compromise between what a woman actually was and what she ought to be' (1992: 74). Francesco's text, for instance, does not address prostitutes because he flatly refused to acknowledge their identities as women. Thus, what we see in the text are only the categories of woman that Francesco deemed capable or worthy of 'education'. In support of this statement, Casagrande describes texts like Francesco's as follows:

The preacher, the moralist and the teacher selected from reality, and even constructed from reality, those categories of women which embodied, or had the potential to embody, the values he was proposing. Only women belonging to predetermined categories had the potential to be virtuous; the others were doubly doomed to social marginalization and a sinful life. In short, women were the subjects of a sociology that was for the most part ideology; of a description that nearly always served a moral purpose; of a classification that was already a model.

(1992: 74-75)

Although *Del reggimento* was just one text among many, it reflects pervasive *trecento* attitudes concerning women that determined the parameters of women's lived experiences. For women, failure to comply with these types of categorisations—in other words, failure to materialise in pre-determined ways—meant painfully high stakes.

Although it is almost certainly the case that many women did not behave in the ways described in *Del reggimento*, it is also the case that women's 'deviant' behaviours were used to justify their social marginalisation and subordination. This damaging process is visible even in the text itself. For instance, Francesco spends numerous pages discussing the 'noble habits' of queens and princesses whom he encouraged middle-class women to emulate in their behaviours. Of working women, Francesco has very little to say—he discusses them '*con brevitare*'—owing to the

⁶¹ Allen states that 'the text does not go into details of particular theories of philosophers that could be helpful to women in achieving [their] goals' (2002: 670).

⁶² Casagrande praises Francesco's categories of women, which were so numerous and diverse, that they are 'by far the richest and most complete' of the extant behavioural guides, and they are 'probably the closest description we have of the real social situation' (1992: 74).

fact that he does not want to dishonour the noble women, to whom he dedicated the book, by overrunning the work with exegesis on the lower classes (Casagrande 1992: 77-79). Francesco affirms the lesser worth of lower class and working women by further marginalising and excluding them in his text. Francesco writes *Del reggimento* for those Florentines 'of good family' (Stoppino 2009: 129). The working classes, therefore, are excluded from being defined as 'good family' by virtuous Florentines. Francesco's advice to young Florentines on right behaviour does not only deal with class identity or professions, *Del reggimento* also extends to the control of the body and its functions (Stoppino 2009: 129). In every directive Francesco provides, there is an underlying assumption about the ways in which the woman's body must be corrected. A few examples will serve to better illustrate this point. Casagrande writes that according to Francesco, women must be modest and must curtail their time in public; 'women were not to enjoy themselves too much, but affect superiority, eat little, dance with composure, and move measuredly' (1992: 85). This strict composure and limited time in public was crucial because of the ways women's bodies incited lust and disorder in the community if left unchecked (*ibid.*, 84). Virtuous women, asserted Francesco, should be taciturn:

I say that she should not keep silent to the extent of never speaking to anyone....Instead I say to speak and keep quiet as required by the time and the place...it is supremely praiseworthy for a young lady of this class to keep silent in public; by speaking she can often incur harm and shame.
(in Stoppino 2009: 133)

Women's silence was necessary for Francesco and many other Florentine 'preachers and moralists', because as Casagrande states, women were considered to be 'expert liars, malicious gossipers, constant arguers, persistent whiners, and chatterboxes' (1992: 98).⁶³ In addition to silent, women should also appear timid and shy. This was achieved primarily through the direction of a woman's gaze; according to Francesco, she should hardly raise her eyes in public and even when addressed, her response should be given with eyes lowered (King 1995: 244). A woman should be industrious and never idle (although this was not an endorsement to take up employment). Francesco suggested the following to young Florentine women:

⁶³ This particular perception of women was a legacy from Saint Paul admonishments in this regard. The need for women's silence, as advocated by Paul, was also discussed by Aquinas (Allen 1985: 400).

According to the custom of the land and the desires of her mother, she should also fully learn how to make handbags, to sew or to weave, so that once in her husband's home she can escape melancholy, avoid idleness and also be of some service.

(in Stoppino 2009: 142)

As concerned as this particular set of advice may sound, Casagrande explains that guarding against women's idleness was another precautionary measure against women's sinful sexualities. She asserts that for Florentines, idleness allowed women's "'natural' inconstancy and infirmity' which would '[give] rise to evil, illicit thoughts and desires' (1992: 96). Hence, industriousness was yet another way to guard woman from herself and guard Florence from woman. The need for a guardian is, of course, the most pressing issue for Francesco, however in terms of his audience (upper-class women) he is careful to suggest this in subtle ways, i.e. sewing lessons with mother.⁶⁴ The widow's body also concerned Francesco. Like the young girl, the widow should avoid contact with men (except for monks or priests), she should confine herself to her home as strictly as possible, and her dress should be plain, without make-up and she should always wear a veil (King 1995: 244). Again, this was not simply fashion advice. Francesco's utmost interest was that women's embodiments were performed chastely and if at all possible, behind locked doors, advice again offered under the guise of wanting to protect women (*ibid.*).⁶⁵ However, the proclamation of concern with the 'protection' of women amounted to little more than the male desire to control, as much as it was deemed possible, the aberrant female body.

Interestingly, one of the areas in which women were deemed as most in need of a guardian was in their charity. As Casagrande observes, although almost all moralists and preachers encouraged women to be 'merciful', charitable activities proved to be a troubling social 'loop hole' (1992: 98). P.H. Cullum echoes Casagrande stating that although 'charitable activity was something that was

⁶⁴ Not all Florentine men exercised Francesco's subtlety, however. One fourteenth-century Florentine recorded the following proverb, 'a horse, whether good or bad, needs a spur; a woman, whether good or bad, needs a lord and master, and sometimes a stick' (in Klapisch-Zuber 1992: 13).

⁶⁵ Florentine women were first under the protection of their fathers, and then they were 'safely' transferred to the protection of their husbands. Even in the case of widows, if another male relative could not be counted on to act as a guardian, women were encouraged to place themselves under the spiritual guidance of God (Casagrande 1992: 91).

enjoined upon all the faithful...access to it was not equally available' (2002: 135). Specifically, women's activities of charity were, on the one hand, deemed 'natural' and appropriate by religious authorities and moralists. On the other hand, however, the zeal with which some women took up charity, and the ways in which it allowed them to be out in the world, became a growing source of anxiety. Theologians believed that women were naturally fit for charity because of their overly-emotional, irrational demeanours that helped them to better tolerate other's suffering and to desire to assist those in need (Casagrande 1992: 97).⁶⁶ Nevertheless, women were perceived to be so unsteady in their capacity to reason that they were warned not to put their own families in jeopardy with their excessive giving (Bynum 1987: 222-226). The suspicion of the poor also required that women's giving be under supervision; because of their weak intellects, women were not expected to be able to judge the real need from the disingenuous (Casagrande 1992: 98). Furthermore, as Cullum argues, women's social subordination and lack of ownership rights meant a more limited range of available charitable activities (2002: 135). Women simply could not give alms to the same extent that men did (or at all without their husband's permission) and even if they had access to food (for instance), it did not legally belong to them but to a father or a husband (*ibid.*).

Other forms of charity did not necessarily depend on making use of household goods, however. During the various waves of the plague, a need for hospitals gave upper-class widows the opportunity to exercise patronage, however, for reasons of modesty, they were frequently encouraged to supplement an already-existing hospital, rather than establish one on their own. King illustrates this point with the example of preacher Giovanni Dominici who, in his 'advice' to a widow, 'warned that it would be better to rebuild foundations already established than to found new ones of her own, and was very anxious that she should realize there could be excesses in devoutness' (1995: 244). Similarly in relation to hospitals, women hypothetically had opportunities to practice charity through acting as carers, or healers. This outlet however could be curtailed by strong suspicions of women healers as witches (Frugoni 1992: 382-387). Again, it is necessary to recognise that

⁶⁶ Casagrande gives the example of Giles of Rome (d. 1316) who was a student of Thomas Aquinas. Giles' works and teaching eventually earned him the position of Prior General of the Augustinian Order (Lagerlund 2011: 418-422).

the bottom line to any of these limitations was indeed the suspicions and fears men in power had about women and further, that these suspicions (of women's excessiveness and irrationality) were fundamentally based on perceptions of the dysfunction of female corporeality. Even when it came to models of sanctity as embodied by the saints, examples of women's charity often served to underline the dysfunction and abnormality of female embodiment. As Cullum asserts, when women saints did exhibit 'excessive' charity, 'they risked aligning themselves with representations of women as unbalanced or unreasoning, which might themselves bring their sanctity into question' (2002: 138). Moreover, when analysing medieval *vitae* of women saints—like those of Elizabeth of Hungary or Zita of Lucca—even the instances where 'excessive sanctity' was deemed acceptable, these *vitae* nevertheless served to affirm the discursive otherness of 'Woman'. Indeed, Cullum confirms how even discursive constructions of exceptional women helped to maintain definitions of real women's embodiment:

All these excessive enactments of charity reinforced conceptions of women as unreasonable, irresponsible, disobedient, but their reprising of negative motifs of femininity could be forgiven, indeed lauded, because it was in the service of a higher calling, by which they demonstrated their victory over their inherent weaknesses as women.

(2002: 144)

Again, we hear echoes of theological definitions of men's spiritual embodiment as the rational, responsible, strong, 'victorious' ideal.⁶⁷ The women saints featured in medieval and early modern *vitae* were celebrated not *for* their excessive acts of charity—in fact, that was something for which they had to be forgiven—but instead, for the ways in which they superseded the weakness of female corporeality.

The three theological virtues were an integral part of *trecento* Florentine religious life. Theological definitions reveal how the three virtues were important for salvation, for solidifying perfect union with God in the afterlife, and with correctly ordering one's spiritual embodiment on earth. However, despite the seemingly universal nature of these virtues, medieval theologians' definitions of men's and women's corporeal identities confirmed men's mode of spiritual and temporal

⁶⁷ Cullum reinforces this characterisation of men's sanctity as depicted in *vitae* like that of John the Almsgiver (2002: 139).

embodiment as the normative ideal. Simultaneously, the female body materialised in these theological discourses as defective, imperfect, irrational, weak, subordinate and in need of supervision. As a result, even women's spiritual embodiments were deemed inadequate and incomplete. These theological definitions of the virtues and of human corporeality served to damage women's embodiment by soliciting women's marginalisation, subordination and exclusion. This is evident in women's historical circumstances (outlined in Chapter Two) such that 'virtuous women' were prohibited from entering certain areas of the city; they were expected to confine themselves to their homes; they were prohibited from ownership (even of their own children); and they very rarely had a say in their own destinies as wives, widows or women religious. The behavioural guides that proliferated throughout the fourteenth century provide further evidence of the ways in which virtue was deemed achievable only by pre-determined categories of women and the only way for women to guarantee their place within these categories was through silence and submission. Even women's acts of charity, which were conceived of as appropriate and natural, were supervised because of the ways in which women's bodies materialised as damaged in *trecento* Florence. As Cullum argued, not even women saints' acts of charity were entirely separated from the damaged female body insofar as their sanctity was situated in their abilities to overcome their assumed embodied weaknesses. However, as Jennifer Ward argues, '[these] views permeated social attitudes, but do not give the whole story as to how women were regarded' (2002: 3-4). In spite of the damaged embodiment available to them, I will argue that *trecento* Florentine women negotiated their positions in the pursuit of salvation in subtle, but important ways. By turning to art historical sources which demonstrate women's access to patronage, I suggest that it becomes possible to locate examples of women's agency.

CHAPTER FIVE

TRECENTO FLORENTINE ART

Religious discourses, like those surrounding the three theological virtues, produced normative ideals as well as material conditions which marginalised and degraded certain modes of embodiment. Within the greater context of *trecento* Florentine culture, religious discourses in their intersection with, and influence upon, civic ideals of *virtù*, engendered social conditions that effectively prohibited women's participation in public life, precluded the possibility of women's voices within Florentine narratives and sequestered women into closed spaces; and which, in some cases, informed women's practices of bodily mortification. As discussed previously, extant *trecento* texts provide only a limited framework within which to analyse women's lived experiences. Whilst some texts were prescriptive for women's social behaviours, and others detail the religious duties of Florentine women,¹ the extent to which these resources describe women's actual experiences should not be taken for granted.² Therefore, other sources must be analysed in order to supplement and enrich textual historical constructions of women. Examining certain types of religious art is one of the ways historians of women's experiences have complexified historical accounts of women's participation within *trecento* Florentine life. Namely, religious art (in the form of frescos, altar paintings, sculptures, etc.), acted as one of the primary means by which doctrine was conveyed

¹ See, for instance, Debby 2001 for a survey of the ways in which many of the sermons of Giovanni Dominici and Bernadino da Siena focused on the correct behaviour of women (who, consequently, made up a large portion of their audiences). I have separated 'social behaviours' from 'religious duties' in order to indicate the fact that some of the authors of the former texts were not members of the lay or ecclesiastical clergy. Nevertheless, it bears mentioning that this is a superficial distinction as these categories are often conflated in the texts themselves, or at the very least, the latter was always expected to inform the former.

² Indeed, regarding the ways in which the aforementioned texts were more about the construction of what women *should* be, Casagrande (1992: 75) asserts: 'In short, women were the subjects of a sociology that was for the most part ideology; of a description that nearly always served a moral purpose; of a classification that was already a model'. Kelly similarly states, 'the relations between the ideology of sex roles and the reality we want to get at are complex and difficult to establish. Such views may be prescriptive rather than descriptive; they may describe a situation that no longer prevails or they may use the relation of the sexes symbolically and not refer primarily to woman in sex roles at all' (1984: 1-2).

to the laity. Owing to limited literacy, most *trecento* Florentines became familiar with church doctrine through popular mendicant preaching³ and through images. Similarly, access to religious art was enjoyed by Florentines of various social standing, whereas texts were often emphatically reserved for those capable of engaging with their content (i.e., clergy, clerics, upper-class men and a very few upper-class women, or women religious). For *trecento* Florentines, religious art also served a critical ritual function. The ways in which Florentine bodies interacted with religious art is most evident in the uses of certain pieces: diptychs were meant to be folded, tucked under the arm and carried throughout the day; statues of Christ that were used in processions show marked wear around the feet where Florentines offered kisses; stone effigies embedded in the floors of cathedrals were treaded upon such that many are now without distinguishing features. Further, religious art is an important resource for researching modes of embodiment not solely because of the uses Florentines made of it, but also because of its own materiality. For *trecento* Florentines, art mattered; its very material presence was the manifestation of its ritual power. The materiality of art was, like the materiality of the body, evidence of God in the world. *Trecento* Florentines did not simply understand art as being a conduit of miraculous events, but as the very composition of miracles, the stuff from which miracles were made. Finally, investigating certain types of religious art is productive for analysing the formation of women's embodied identities because women's consumption, participation, and engagement with art are visible and traceable. As Chiara Frugoni points out, toward the end of the thirteenth century, 'women's newly acquired "right to appear" in images', instigated portraits of women—not just as allegory or symbol—but as active, even in occupations outside of the domestic sphere (1992: 391).⁴ Moreover, from the fourteenth century, evidence exists which testifies to some women's roles as patronesses and donatrices of personal and communal commissions. The pieces of religious art that resulted from women's commissions illuminate the ways in which some women were able to

³ As discussed in the previous two chapters, most sermons given within ecclesiastical churches were in Latin; a language the majority of the population did not understand. However, throughout the fourteenth century, mendicant preachers drew large crowds, both to their churches and in the piazzas, owing at least in part to the fact that their sermons were in the vernacular.

⁴ Françoise Piponnier (1992: 323-326) also discusses portraits of working women. This point will be discussed further, below.

participate in *trecento* religious life, sometimes even in spite of prohibitive discursive norms. Before proceeding to the core discussion of this chapter, I want first to consider further this last point as it not only provides the criteria which I will employ in my analysis of particular artworks, it also informs my argument regarding women's embodied participation more generally.

The works of art discussed in this chapter have been selected because of the ways in which they present women's experiences, women's patronage, or both. Further, the pieces herein have at least some extent textual evidence of women's involvement and therefore they provide a more discernible context within which an analysis may be constructed. My selections are not more indicative of women's embodied experiences, nor do they make up an exhaustive catalogue of *trecento* commissions of which women were a part.⁵ They are simply works about which we can say something with reasonable grounds. The question of what I am arguing is perhaps more pressing, here. As I have argued in the previous two chapters, soteriological discourses—exemplified in the three theological virtues, in particular—precipitated the mutual imbrication of normative ideals along with damaging material effects that marginalised, subjugated, and sometimes physically harmed women's bodies. The analysis of religious art in this chapter is thus not intended to 'compensate for' or 'redeem' the material effects of these discursive norms. Conversely, my insistence on recognising women's participation in the creation and use of religious art is not to imply the existence of women's agency such that their activities can be characterised as deliberately subversive of religious discourses. I am neither interested in constructing a history of fourteenth-century Florence as wholly misogynist—although I believe there are certainly specific moments in texts and ideologies which can be labelled as such⁶—nor do I believe

⁵ To my knowledge, no such study exists. Although there are some outstanding publications focused on *trecento* Florentine women's involvement in the making and use of religious art, a lack of sufficient documentation for many surviving works of art from this period prevents a fully comprehensive study. For studies concerning women's participation in the making and veneration of art in the Middle Ages, see for instance: King 1992, 1998; Frugoni 1992, 1996; Eckstein 2005; Clark 2007; Rigaux 1999. For an excellent study of *trecento* Florentine women's commissions as an integral element of religious art generally, see Warr 1994.

⁶ In his essay, 'The Clerical Gaze', Jacques Dalarun asserts that it is unsurprising to find misogyny in clerical thought during the Middle Ages and in fact, 'it would be a simple but unrewarding task to amass textual evidence for this assertion'. Nevertheless, he asks, 'why describe a society as more or less misogynist when no culture that could reasonably be described as nonmisogynist had yet emerged? And what is the point of taking an apologetic

that the discursive norms within which women's embodied experiences were formed, and sometimes damaged, can be understood unproblematically as liberatory.⁷ A careful reading of *trecento* Florentine histories reveals that religious discourses were hegemonic, but they were not intractable.⁸ Having said that, in situating some women's participation in the making and worship of religious art within the context of *trecento* religious discourses, I am not suggesting simply that their experiences were disruptive, nor is it accurate to suggest that they were purely collusive (although that was certainly sometimes the case). The veritable see-sawing between taking seriously the damaging material effects some religious discourses created for women's modes of embodiment and recognising the ways in which women participated in the commissioning of religious art even in spite of their marginalisation, points to the difficulties inherent in historical studies of women's corporeal experiences. For some feminist scholars, these tensions have resulted in assertions that women's behaviours were only ever collusive with hegemonic discourses, or that their adoption of religious narratives provides evidence of a sort of 'false-consciousness'. Other scholars assert that women's own voices must be prioritised as a heuristic tool, such that medieval women's assertions that the very discourses which were responsible for their exclusion from religious life were also the ones they found most meaningful, trumps all other conclusions we might draw about the material effects of religious discourses.⁹ In either case, the mechanisms of power behind religious discourses are flattened; the complexity of women's materiality, behaviours, and desires is reduced; and the resultant conclusions tend

line, of describing the great sanctuaries...to which large numbers of people went to pay homage to the Virgin...as if in praise of the one who was and remained "blessed among women?" What good did this exceptional benediction do for the others, for all the women who were not so blessed? Better to avoid anachronism' (1992: 16).

⁷ I have discussed, in my earlier critique of Caroline Walker-Bynum's *Christian Materiality*, the ways in which her analysis of 'paradox' often fails to acknowledge fully the historical instances wherein the threat of one's materiality outweighs the possibilities, and the resultant effects are not ambiguous, but instead discernibly harmful.

⁸ Studies like Strocchia's (2009) nuance our understanding of discursive power in *trecento* Florence as she explores the ways in which nuns 'contested the boundaries of enclosure' through activities like textile production. Whilst she does not ignore the prevalence of imposed cloistering laws, Strocchia nevertheless capitalises on archived financial records to tease out some strategies Florentine nuns employed to achieve greater participation within economic life without violating their vows. See also Strocchia's (2011) essay on nun apothecaries.

⁹ See, for instance, Bynum (1987).

towards contradiction at best, and anachronism at worst. As stated previously, I do not think it is productive for feminist scholars to shy away from acknowledging the ways in which some types of religious art (even when commissioned by women) affirmed and upheld the dominant discourses that gave rise to women's marginalisation and oppression; at the same time however, I argue that women's participation in the making and use of religious art defied in some ways their embodied marginalisation and degradation.

1. The Importance of Art in Trecento Florence

There are many reasons to incorporate art historical analyses within a study of *trecento* Florence. Scholars have frequently used religious art to reflect on phenomena as wide ranging as economic prosperity, psychological responses to plague, or the construction of space.¹⁰ The reasons discussed herein are certainly not the only arguments for reading religious art as integral to *trecento* Florentine life. The following discussion does provide, nonetheless, some of the primary reasons why religious art must be taken into account for a study focused on modes of gendered embodiment. First, the importance of religious art is discussed in relation to issues of access and literacy. Although ecclesiastical and philosophical texts are useful to building an accurate survey of the intellectual and religious currents that informed social discourses, they are nevertheless, insufficient for determining the various ways *trecento* Florentines were embodied.¹¹ In order to paint a more complex portrait of formative religious discourses, many types of resources—which were accessed by more than just elite Florentine men—must be considered. Widening the field of inquiry is particularly important in analyses concerned with investigating the ways in which women's embodiments were formed and performed, owing to the categorical exclusion of women from ecclesiastical hierarchies. Religious art not only further demonstrates which doctrines were employed by the

¹⁰ Regarding an example of research that combines art and economic prosperity, see Goldthwaite 1993; for a discussion regarding the psychological effects of the plague see Meiss 1951; for various approaches to the creation of Florentine space see Crum and Paoletti 2006; and for visual notions of the medieval city, see Frugoni 1992.

¹¹ Vauchez describes the problems with historical studies which were overly reliant upon elite texts: 'until a relatively recent date, the history of the Church was too often limited to the history of its hierarchy and its clergy, leaving the Christian masses in the shadows, as if they were somehow disreputable' (1993: xv). This trend, he argues, has its roots in clerical attitudes towards the lay population of the Middle Ages itself.

clergy to educate the lay population, but it is also a particularly fruitful source for examining how these doctrines had real, material effects. Kieckhefer describes the proliferation of modalities of art during the medieval period and the ways new or renewed themes became significant for the lay population:

Devotional art too enjoyed a heyday; this was the era of lavishly ornamented books of hours commissioned for wealthy patrons, of small devotional ivory panels for private devotion, of inexpensive and generally crude woodcuts for popular consumption, and of intricate polyptychs to decorate both high altars and side altars in churches and chapels. Themes with major significance in European devotional art, such as the *pieta*, emerged during this period; others, like the man of sorrows, attained new-found popularity.

(1987: 75)

Modern historiographical studies have suggested that more Florentines were literate (in at least the vernacular) than previously thought;¹² nonetheless, much of what framed a *trecento* Florentine's participation in religious life was images. As Frugoni notes, 'precisely because the people fed on images and not books—they observed paintings, and listened to their exposition in sermons, but did not read the Bible for themselves—the substance of their spiritual life came from this world of images' (1996: 135).¹³ Further, in spite of *trecento* women's limited access to reading, and certainly to writing, they were permitted (in the cases of the middle and upper classes, and in religious orders) to participate, albeit in limited ways, in artistic patronage (King 1992, 1998). Some types of religious art, therefore, provide data about women's experiences and participation in *trecento* Florence that is wholly absent from elite textual sources where such experiences were systematically excluded. In fact, as Bynum notes, 'by the fourteenth century, images sometimes replaced relics as conveyers of healing power. A visionary and visual culture flourished, one in which revelations to women played a crucial role' (2011: 19). Thus, religious art was not only an integral element to *trecento* Florentine religious life more generally, it was also specifically important to women's experiences.

¹² Casagrande for example, cites thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors, like Philip of Novara, who argued that lay women's literacy was to be avoided, although many granted 'the privilege of reading and writing to women of noble lineage as well as nuns'. By the fifteenth century, however, we begin to see evidence 'that a wider range of women living at home were given the possibility of learning to read, sometimes even to write' (1992: 101). See also Frugoni 1992: 397-400.

¹³ See also Duggan 1989: 227-251; Baxandall 1988; Camille 1985: 26-49.

Building on this last assertion, the lived experiences religious art generated are also of central importance within this study. The materiality of the art was instrumental to Florentine worship and ritual devotion. Far from simply providing visual stimulus, *trecento* Florentine religious art facilitated and elicited physical interaction (Frugoni 1996: 132). In this way, Kieckhefer suggests that for a study of religious life, '[many] of the sources for devotional practice are thus "archaeological": they are concrete objects or structures used for devotion. [...] Works of art, to the extent that they were linked to devotional practice, give insight into the performative element in devotion' (1987: 82).¹⁴ A study of the material effects of *trecento* religious doctrines, therefore, necessarily extends past ecclesiastical texts to include religious art. The materiality of art mattered. As Bynum has argued, 'medieval images, whether in wood and paint or in prayer and the imagination, were often, in a stunning and quite specific sense, material—tactile, textured, architectural, often colored and/or three-dimensional' (2011: 105). She explains that in their very materiality, medieval images 'seem to articulate a power not so much beyond as within themselves' (*ibid.*). Cole similarly describes how the dynamism and physicality of religious art was central to Christian experience:

The painted and carved images of Christ and the saints were not viewed as neutral, lifeless representations; instead, they were potent supernatural beings that could, and often did, intervene in the life of the worshipper. Like the wine and the wafer of the Mass, the holy images could be filled with a living presence.

(1987: 77)

The ways in which some religious art 'acted' was indicative of how Christian experiences were performative. Modes of embodiment were intimately tied up with *trecento* Florentine men's and women's relationships to religious art. Rituals which involved art always involved the body. Whether kneeling in front of a diptych, wearing a small bronze plaquette on one's body to protect from the plague,¹⁵ or leaving instructions for art to be commissioned as a result of one's dead body, the materiality of art was interwoven with the materiality of Florentine bodies. Miles, in fact, suggests that for medieval people, bodies anchored much of their religious

¹⁴ Echoing this, Goldthwaite goes so far as to describe medieval Christianity as 'a religion oriented around things' (1993: 72).

¹⁵ For some discussions of bronze miniatures and their uses, see Cole 1987: 61-65; Pope-Hennessy 1965; Pincus 2001.

experiences; whether ‘directly or indirectly’, men and women ‘[talked] about bodies constantly’ (2003: 184).¹⁶ The various ways in which some religious art was innate to *trecento* men’s and women’s modes of embodiments is, perhaps, nowhere more obvious than in the meditational writings of authors like Bernard of Clairvaux and the Bonaventure.¹⁷ These authors encouraged medieval Christians to interact with religious images such that they found themselves transported into the image itself; so that every sense was engaged and focused on recreating for the worshipper the lived experience of the subject of the art. The practices that were prescribed and subsequently practiced by these writers elicited wholly affected, bodily responses to religious art. In the production of the art itself, the move towards affect and bodily response was most famously visible in the works of Giotto and his successors (Gombrich 1999: 29-30). Thus, art that depicted and invited embodied emotion, and meditative practices—that when done correctly, often resulted in tears, fainting, and even stigmata—combined to create a religious environment in *trecento* Florence that (sometimes paradoxically) linked salvation with materiality.

Religious art is thus an important resource in analysing the material effects of religious discourses on gendered modes of embodiment in *trecento* Florence. Thus far, I have discussed briefly the ways surveying art addresses historical problems of literacy and access and the ways matter mattered. Framing the predominance of art in *trecento* Florentine religious experiences would not be complete, however, without examining the role of meditative texts like those by Bernard of Clairvaux and Pseudo-Bonaventure¹⁸ and their visual equivalents in the works by the Giotto-

¹⁶ Miles explains the various ways, both consciously and unconsciously, medieval Christians engaged with bodies: ‘People who thought of themselves as the “body of Christ” engaged their bodies and senses quite consciously and purposefully in their liturgies and devotional practices, the religious images they placed on the walls of their worship places and burial chambers, and in the buildings they gathered in for communal worship’ (2005: 184).

¹⁷ As will become obvious in the next section, Francis of Assisi’s modes of piety were instrumental in the development of this type of literature, particularly in the works of the Bonaventure who was Francis’ most famous biographer.

¹⁸ It is also important to clarify my use of the moniker, ‘Pseudo-Bonaventure’ in identifying an author for *MVC*. As discussed by McNamer (2009), the origins of the text, as well as its author, are issues still up for some debate. Owing to the scope of this thesis, I cannot here recount the arguments for re-framing the text’s origins; thus, my use of ‘Pseudo-Bonaventure’ is a result of an accepted identification within existing scholarly literature, however I use it with the recognition that the matter of authorship is far from closed. See McNamer (2009: 905, n.1).

school.¹⁹ The shifts these types of texts and new modes of art brought about are described by Gombrich as ‘the increasing demand for what I have called the dramatic evocation, the return to the desire not to be told only *what* happened according to the Scriptures, but also *how* it happened, what the events must have looked like to an eyewitness’ (1999: 29). Although Bernard of Clairvaux lived between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, his writings were hugely influential and informed both lay and mendicant forms of devotion in the centuries that followed (Cousins 1987: 378). His most famous works within *trecento* Florentine religious life were arguably *De Amore Dei* and a commentary on the Song of Songs. In these texts, Bernard developed a type of meditation or contemplation focused specifically on the humanity and carnality of Christ. Therefore, when praying or meditating, Bernard prescribed the incorporation of ‘an image’ of Christ in his very human forms. According to Cousins, Bernard writes that ‘the soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending’ (1987: 379-380). Vauchez notes that ‘St. Bernard speaks of Christ as a friend, whose terrestrial existence he relives with intense participation, moved to pity at his humble birth and shedding tears over his painful Passion’ (1989: 19). Ultimately, the mode of piety Bernard promotes is one of affection and involves a personal attachment to the human, embodied Christ through the use of images. The Pseudo-Bonaventure, building on the model developed by Bonaventure in his *LV*, also developed modes of piety that were solidly situated in the body and that relied upon religious art as a focus for meditation. McNamer suggests that the *MVC*, with ‘its graphic depictions of the violence of the Passion, [and] its use of the present tense and deitic rhetoric (“here,” “there”)', issued a direct appeal to its audience ‘to feel love and compassion for Christ and his mother’ (2009: 905-906). In terms of the art being produced, crucifixes became one of the most important subjects of religious art and under artists like Giotto, they reflected exactly the type of anguish the Pseudo-Bonaventure encouraged for meditation. Kieckhefer notes:

¹⁹ In coupling these types of texts with works by Giotto and his successors, I am not suggesting that the former was entirely responsible for the latter. Such a linear reading, although generally accepted in some previous scholarship, has been thrown into question by scholars like McNamer (2009) who problematise the origins of the *MVC* text, specifically. Certainly, affective modes of piety were already established and influential for painters like Giotto, but whether specific texts, like the *MVC*, were directly responsible for the change in artistic style is not uncontested.

The cross or crucifix was of central importance for both liturgy and devotion. Paintings by Cimabue, Giotto, and Fra Angelico depict Mass being celebrated on altars adorned only by crosses. As already mentioned, crucifixes were common foci of private devotion, and roadside shrines commonly featured a crucifix. Furthermore, the crucifixion was one of the most frequent subjects in art throughout the Middle Ages.

(1987: 85)

Gombrich further emphasises Giotto's particular impact on the production of *trecento* crucifixes noting that he '[transformed] the traditional pictograph into a living presence, and the participants into beings with an inner life of inexhaustible intensity' (1999: 30). As well as meditating on the Passion, the Pseudo-Bonaventure alternatively endorsed meditation practices which placed the nativity at the centre of one's prayers, because of the powerful humanity displayed by Christ's birth. Again, Giotto's work can be referenced simultaneously in order to see how these themes centred on Christ's humanity, and in this case, his birth and infancy, became prevalent in the *trecento*. According to Cole, Giotto's '*Ognissanti Madonna*, of about 1310... forged a new relationship with the spectator' (1987: 98).²⁰ Demonstrating the humanness emphasised by Giotto, Cole writes, '[the] majestic mother and her sturdy son are immediate, believable as human beings. The construction of their bodies and the way the bodies are revealed under the clothing give the holy figures physicality' (*ibid.*).

It was thus not simply the content of religious art that increasingly featured the human, embodied Christ, but also meditative texts which encouraged bodily empathetic engagement with the content that made *trecento* art immensely important for Florentines. Moreover, these themes and modes of piety add to the impetus to analyse religious art insofar as it was essential to Florentine women's experiences. Whether meditating on the suffering and death of Christ, or focusing on his birth, Pseudo-Bonaventure, for instance, argued that this type of affective piety was particularly suitable for those outside ecclesiastical structures. Frugoni cites Pseudo-Bonaventure as arguing that, 'the contemplation of the life of Christ in human terms, because it concerns bodily existence, is recommended as suitable for the unsophisticated and not for the perfect', while 'the higher contemplation...that is, that concerning the heavenly court and God's majesty...is reserved exclusively for

²⁰ See Fig. 1 in the Appendix.

the perfect' (1996: 135-136). Because *MVC* was written for a Poor Clare, it is not unreasonable to suggest that modes of affective piety, performed via the use of images, were particularly directed at women.²¹ In affirmation of this argument, Bornstein notes:

[A]ffective piety was presented to women as a devotional mode peculiarly suited to female capacities, as these were understood in the late Middle Ages. Women, with their weak intellects and strong passions, were encouraged to meditate on the most intimately human and grippingly immediate moments in the life of Jesus: his birth, suffering, and death.

(1996: 9)

The relationships between religious discourses, embodied subject positions, and modes of piety were, in the *trecento*, tightly intertwined, particularly in as much as they intersected with religious art. Although production and consumption of religious art was not the only mode of worship available to *trecento* Florentines, it was more widely accessed by the laity, it proliferated and appeared both in public and private spaces, it invited bodily interaction and it provides one site within which women undoubtedly participated in social life.

II. A Brief Overview of Trecento Florentine Religious Art

The use of the phrase 'religious art' can be somewhat misleading. It might seem to suggest a homogeneous, monolithic body of works that were all created for a singular purpose, or which were perceived in a uniformed way. In *trecento* Florence, neither of these premises was true. Thus, while I employ the phrase for the sake of referential brevity, I do not intend to present a blanket analysis of *trecento* art, nor will I attempt to identify a distinct 'genre'. Having said that, however, there was very little art that could be characterised as 'not religious'. As Cole asserts, '[the] moral precepts and protection of the church extended (or were supposed to extend) into all functions and levels of society' (1987: 149). Even when domestic wall paintings

²¹ In fact, McNamer goes so far as to suggest that the author of the original *MVC* was not a Franciscan friar, but rather, a nun, solidly linking women with 'incarnational' meditation. With respect to later, longer versions of *MVC*, McNamer writes: '[all] of these are amalgamated texts containing didactic interpolations, expansions, and surprisingly reactionary corrections by a Franciscan friar (perhaps Johannes de Caulibus) of an earlier, livelier, and more radically "incarnational" recension originally written by another author—almost certainly, I will suggest, a nun; probably, but not necessarily, a Poor Clare' (2009: 907-910). Flora and Pecorini Cignoni (2006) also link *MVC* to the Poor Clares, and to women's religiosity in *trecento* Pisa, more generally.

began to focus increasingly on Roman history in the fifteenth century, the virtues and morals these visual narratives extolled were tied up with behavioural ideals equally informed by theology. Nonetheless, it is not my purpose here to develop a theory about all religious art in *trecento* Florence and I have, as much as possible, tried to employ language that proscribes this as a possibility. In a very perfunctory, albeit loose sense, my use of the phrase 'religious art' refers to artistic productions that have a theme which is explicitly Christian in nature. In Florence, as we shall see, this often extended to civic commissions like paintings for a guild-hall, or frescoes for the city's outer walls. Utilising this kind of definition results in an overwhelming field of study and thus, for the purposes of this thesis, religious art must be narrowed further to include only works that were also intended to function as part of worship or act as a ritual aid. Again, this hardly tapers the available resources; in the interest of discussing some general trends exhibited by these kinds of religious art, however, I believe some flexibility is helpful. At the point that this thesis turns to women's commissions, works of art will be referred to individually and with as much specific detail as possible. My arguments for the ways in which some women participated in the making and worship of religious art are not, as I suggested above, in the interest of establishing a theory to be universally applied to all women's commissions. Rather than attempting to frame all *trecento* Florentine women's commissions of art in such a way that elides their specificity, I am interested in how each instance of women's participation might enable us to discuss the varied ways women expressed their agency in inhabiting certain normative subject positions. This type of analysis does in some respects rely on what we can know about the ways religious art functioned to perpetuate standards of orthodoxy, nonetheless, it also seeks to exhibit changes in art that served to widen or stretch those standards.

(i) *The Performance of Trecento Religious Art*

Before moving on to examine the changes that materialised in individual women's commissions, it is necessary briefly to discuss some common trends in *trecento* religious art. Although various types of art were used in different ways, and changes in techniques signalled changing values, some general comments may be made in order to more thoroughly engage with the pieces commissioned by women.

Primarily, *trecento* Florentine religious art was not produced or valued purely for aesthetics. Every production, whether for personal use, for the home, for a family chapel, or within the walls of the church was expected to perform a function as well as to convey artistic skill. According to Brucker, 'Florentine art was functional. It satisfied particular social needs and was influenced by changes in the nature and priority of those needs' (1969: 252). In the Florentine home, Cole asserts, the walls 'were alive not only with color and line, but also with moral and didactic messages. Other objects afforded protection from sudden death, the plague, and a host of other Renaissance fears' (1987: 74). In chapels in churches, altars may have been expertly carved or the silversmithing of the chalice may have conveyed intricate, dazzling detail, but more than anything, these items served sacramental functions and their appearance was meant to draw attention above all else, to the Eucharist. Cole writes:

[Chapels]...were functional and programmatic. Their frescoes and sculpture both decorate and narrate. All the painted and carved objects tell stories perfectly suited to the chapels' uses as the location of an altar, as a burial place, or as a great ceremonial chamber. Altarpiece, fresco, tomb, and other sculpture were all part of a carefully planned, unified scheme to enhance the sacramental nature of the chapel.

(1987: 87)

Religious art could be used to promote models of sanctity. A bride might be given a *desco da parto* as a wedding gift. According to Cole, '[these] wooden trays, usually painted on both sides, are called birth platters or salvers, because they were used to carry sweets to a new mother; in fact, they were often probably given as wedding gifts' (1987: 49). Many times *deschi da parto* were painted with scenes of the birthing chamber and were meant as talismans of fertility but occasionally, they were used to impart more explicitly preferred modes of behaviour.²² One example from Apollonio di Giovanni, depicts one of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, (Triumph of Chastity; Fig. 2).²³ For Florentines, Cole writes, '[chastity] meant, besides purity, modesty and humility, qualities demanded of the good bride, and an object such as the North Carolina Museum *desco* serves as a continual exhortation of virtue' (1987: 50). In communities of men and women religious, their choirs or refectories were often frescoed with narrative scenes meant to induce contemplation. Of course, as

²² For studies concerned with *deschi di parto* see Pope-Hennessy and Christiansen 1980: 6-11 or Callmann 1980.

²³ The *desco* is now in the North Carolina Museum of Art.

discussed earlier, some types of religious art, like personal altars or illuminated manuscripts, were expected to make it possible for the worshipper to enter into the experiences depicted. Paintings of the crucifixion or the deposition were used often to meditate on and replicate the agony of both Christ and his mother. In this way, works like the *Pietà* by Giotto (Fig. 3), inspired praise from Vasari for Giotto's skill, but its function as an altar screen would have also induced intense feelings amongst the faithful who knelt in front of it, awaiting the distribution of the Eucharist (Fossi 2009: 64). Religious art, whether literally functional (as was the case with altars, for instance), functional because of its ritual uses, or didactic was skilfully constructed, but also it was always at work.

(ii) *The Human Suffering of Christ*

Another trend common amongst various types of *trecento* Florentine art that is particularly relevant for the analysis of modes of embodiment was the increasing emphasis on the suffering or death of Christ. Kieckhefer describes this development in four ways: first, he suggests 'there was an increasing interest in the entire sequence of events, including those before the crucifixion... and those after it' (1987: 86). Second, within paintings of crucifixions, the entire depiction became increasingly complex, including entire casts of characters where traditionally there had only been Christ, his mother, John the Baptist and perhaps Mary Magdalene. Third, specific moments from the 'postcrucifixion narrative' were chosen more frequently for interpretation, such as portrayals of the Man of Sorrows or the *Pietà* being the most popular. Finally, by the end of the *trecento*, and into the fifteenth century, 'there was a fondness for emblems of the passion, either isolated or in combinations—the flagella with which Christ was whipped, the crown of thorns, the veil of Veronica, the instruments of crucifixion, the wounds, etc.' (1987: 86).²⁴ These elements represented developments that brought Christ's human body to the centre of many women's and men's devotions. It was not just his humanity which was of interest however; depictions became ever more agonising and graphic,

²⁴ The increasing artistic representation of Christ's wounds is similarly discussed by Bynum (2011: 196). Clark discusses the frequent use of Veronica's veil in images intended for devotional or meditational purposes although she notes that within medieval Italy, the use of the image was not as popular as in other parts of Europe (2007: 185, n.10).

incorporating motifs like blood that spurted and flowed.²⁵ The human suffering of Christ became a crucial element in religious images. As noted by many scholars, one of the primary iconographic changes that ushered in the growing emphasis on Christ's embodied suffering was the shift from four nails in Christ's feet on the cross (Fig. 5), to three. According to Frugoni, '[this] felicitous iconographic innovation spread through Italy, especially Tuscany, and supplanted the earlier portrayal with four nails because the new triangular schema placed the wounded body in greater tension, emphasizing Christ's agony' (1996: 134).²⁶ This shift towards a 'realistic depiction of Christ's humanity' became so prevalent within *trecento* religious art that Cousins argues the Crucifixion began to overshadow the Resurrection. He asserts, 'a shift from a stylized image of the victorious Savior to the agonizing, bleeding human Christ on the cross...culminated in an almost exclusive emphasis on Christ's passion to the point of overshadowing his resurrection' (1987: 375). Although not all religious art embraced this shift towards affected, bodily, agonising depictions of Christ,²⁷ it is nonetheless a change observable in a large portion of *trecento* art.

(iii) *The Visibility of Women*

Similar to the shift towards a more 'realistic' portrayal of Christ's (suffering) humanity, the increased visibility of women within religious art in the *trecento* was not manifest in all artistic productions but nonetheless, is an important change for

²⁵ See, for instance, Figure 4 by Nardo di Cione.

²⁶ Frugoni attributes the shift from four nails to three to Pseudo-Bonaventure: 'The three nails were first mentioned in the *Meditations on Christ's Passion* by Pseudo-Bonaventure, and they received their first artistic representation at nearly the same time (1260), in Nicola Pisano's Crucifixion on the pulpit of the baptistry in Pisa' (1996: 134). Also, see her endnote (1996: 156, n. 21). For the debate surrounding this dating, and the attribution of the *MVC* to Pseudo-Bonaventure, see my n. 30-31 above.

²⁷ Successor to Giotto, Florentine painter Andrea di Cione, known as Orcagna, painted works which adopted none of Giotto's methods of spatial incorporation of the viewer, 'fleshing' out the bodies of the painting's subjects, or depicting psychological affectation on the subject's faces. Meiss notably attributed this 'harsher' style to a social and psychological reaction to the plague (1951: 9-16). Cole, amongst others, has suggested that this argument, while containing some merit, is too simple (1987: 102-104). Gombrich also argues that Meiss' theory is not complex enough, however, and referencing Orcagna's Strozzi Altarpiece, he suggests that the piece reflects both the harsher style, characterised by Meiss, in the altar painting and the 'dramatic intensity' of earlier styles in the predella below (1999: 64). He suggests that 'as in nature, hybrids often prove infertile, and in the history of art too, this rather confusing mixture of modes was not granted a long life'; thus, by the last decades of the fourteenth century, artists like Agnolo Gaddi were using an almost entirely Giotto-esque style (1999: 63-65).

examining women's participation in Florentine life. It is certainly the case that images of women, or female figures appeared in religious art much earlier than the fourteenth century. However, the ways in which women figured were rarely reflective of 'normal' or day-to-day experiences women at that time might have had. Rather, women were the ultimate pictorial symbol. As Frugoni states, '[a] woman's body was considered an allegory in itself' (1992: 370). Images of Eve were, of course, commonplace and often provide viewers with an unmistakable impression of the feminine nature of sin. In sculptures, paintings, literature, and even in plays,²⁸ Eve is portrayed as communicating closely with the serpent that, in many cases, has a female head or torso which resembles closely that of the woman (Fig.6).²⁹ Suzannah Biernoff writes, '[the] serpent with a maiden's-head seems to be a thirteenth-century pictorial innovation. It is consistent, of course, with the idea of woman as a duplicitous seductress' (2002: 43). Biernoff notes further, that 'as the embodiment of the flesh, Eve was united in nature and purpose with the serpent' (*ibid.*, 45).

Intimately connected with representations of woman as Eve, was the medieval development of woman as the face of death. According to Frugoni, 'Eve allowed herself to be seduced by the devil and, through her, original sin, death, and eternal damnation came into the world' (1992: 362). As a result, Eve (and her daughters) were equated with death and '[when], around 1340, Death was first represented as an abstract concept...the hybrid figure took on the aspect of a horrible old hag with clawed hands and feet and bat's wings' (Frugoni 1992: 363). In investigating frescoes like *The Triumph of Death* by Buffalmacco, or *Inferno* by Bartolo di Fredi, Frugoni demonstrates the explicit equivalence of the female body with the figure of Death in the *trecento* (1992: 363-367). Similarly, the figure of woman was popularly employed in the Middle Ages as a disguise for the devil. As Frugoni highlights, 'the devil who dresses up as a young girl' was an 'essential part of a saint's biography' and manifested not only in texts, but also in frescoes like *The Devil Dressed as a Pilgrim* by Buffalmacco (1992: 349-351). Within medieval hagiographies, the number of women possessed by the devil far outstripped the

²⁸ Frugoni notes, '[the] convention was inherited and sustained in medieval Mystery Plays in which it was easier to put a human being on stage dressed up as a snake. (Surviving glosses establish that an ideal reptile should also have female breasts)' (1992: 359).

²⁹ More studies that explore the female appearance of the serpent are Kelly 1971; Dunlop 2002; and Phillips 1984: 61-62.

number of men who became possessed and according to Frugoni, it 'can be explained by the well-known woman/devil correlation. This was so commonplace at the time that the onlooker would have considered it perfectly natural for the devil to choose a member of the female sex as his favorite disguise' (*ibid.*, 350-351). Young Gregg also describes the medieval association of women with devils³⁰ (particularly within homiletic sermons):

Devils both possessed angelic power and were wicked beyond redemption; women might be either dangerous temptresses or imitations of the Virgin Mary....They partook of two natures: although originally infused with God's goodness they stubbornly rejected it, thereby removing the locus of their relationship to the Christian community from the center of authority to the margin.

(1997: 18-21)

These symbolic representations were not, as Dunlop suggests, necessarily 'windows' into 'a recognisable version' of medieval women's worlds (2002: 135). Nevertheless, the didactic role these types of images fulfilled contributed to the difficulty women had 'to overcome or bypass the condition of being born female' (Frugoni 1992: 367).

Another powerful female figure frequently featured in *trecento* Florentine religious art that was markedly less degrading, but equally as distant from women's realities was the Virgin Mary. Surveying all the ways images of the Virgin were used, and the varieties of manifestations those images took, in *trecento* Florence would neither be feasible nor constructive in this space.³¹ However, one example will be discussed to highlight the complex relationship that existed between images of the Virgin Mary and Florentine women, and further, the care that must be taken by scholars when reflecting on the meaning and usage of images of Mary. During the *trecento*, the motif of the Coronation of the Virgin was hugely popular in Florentine painting (Gordon 2011: 84).³² The San Pier Maggiore altarpiece painted by Jacopo di

³⁰ Young Gregg is also concerned with the ways Jews were grouped with women and devils to create the ultimate Others. Clark (2007) similarly suggests that anti-Semitic sentiments were integral to Passion piety and that the alterity of Jews was a crucial element within meditation texts. Bynum (2011) also describes the ways in which 'holy matter' miracles often pointed towards medieval Jews as perpetrators.

³¹ An influential survey of Marian cult and images is Warner 1983. Dunlop (2002) also reflects on the meaning and usage of images of Mary, specifically within the *trecento*. See also Miles 1989; Graef 1963; and Pelikan 1996.

³² For three examples of prominent Florentine Coronation paintings, all within forty years of one another see Gordon 2011: 52-91, 116-127, 220-227. Gordon includes further discussion

Cione in 1370 has been of particular interest to feminist art historians because of its ritual use and intended audience. King argues that the altarpiece (fig. 7; 7a) was an 'artistic investment' by the Benedictine nuns of San Pier Maggiore (1992: 374).³³ As a result of a recurring ceremony within the convent called 'the marriage of the abbess', King suggests that the nuns of San Pier Maggiore commissioned the altarpiece to be a backdrop; one which would echo the themes of the ceremonial instatement of the abbess by the bishop. She describes the ceremony, saying:

In token of the early power of San Pier Maggiore all the bishops of Florence until the late sixteenth century performed a ceremony of homage to the abbess and her oldest nuns at their entry into office....It entailed the bishop receiving the hospitality of the nuns in the form of a splendid meal served in the convent, and followed by the bishop spending the night there in a lavishly prepared bedroom. It was completed by a service before this alterpiece [sic] (in its location over the high-altar) when the bishop and the abbess were seated side by side, and a magnificent ring was given to her by him.

(1992: 375)

King asserts that an understanding of this particular ritualistic event enables us to understand the selection of the central theme of the Coronation—'a ceremony in which a woman is honoured by a man' (*ibid.*). Further, she suggests that this kind of commission would remind the congregation (present at the ceremony) 'of the venerable privileges of the convent as well as paying due respect to the patron-saint of the church, to the saints of Florence and of the Benedictine order' (*ibid.*). In this rendition of the commissioning, women's participation is read as self-affirming; for King, the nuns chose the theme of the Coronation in order to convey the reverence owed to their abbess, to affirm her place at the side of the bishop, and to communicate their own centrality to the community. The Virgin Mary in this scenario affirms the abbess' purity, her piety, and her positioning within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Although Dillian Gordon acknowledges King's contributions to the art historical literature surrounding the altarpiece (insofar as she links the painting to the 'marriage of the abbess'), she nonetheless disputes King's theory of patronage. Gordon argues that rather than being commissioned by the nuns of San

of the Coronation motif as being 'quintessentially Florentine' in her analysis of Daddi's painting (2011: 122-124).

³³ The three main panels of the altarpiece are in the National Gallery in London, there are also six predella scenes which are located in Italian and American museums. See King 1992: 374-375 and Gordon 2011: 52-91 for dimensions and locations. For a proposed sketch of the altarpiece in its entirety see Gordon 2011: 79.

Pier Maggiore, Cione's *Coronation of the Virgin* was 'almost certainly commissioned by members of the large and powerful Albizzi family' (2011: 85; 149, n. 149 and 151). Rather than the altarpiece being commissioned as a result of the nuns' desires to affirm the authority of their abbess and their convent, Gordon argues that it was more likely 'prompted by the fact that the Albizzi wished to demonstrate their connection to their cousin, the bishop of Florence, Cardinal Pietro Corsini (in office 1363-70), given the importance of the church to the bishop of Florence' (*ibid.*). Gordon synthesises the themes and motifs of the painting, illuminating the details surrounding the various saints pictured.³⁴ Gordon concludes that, '[the] front row saints therefore suggest connections with the name saints of the Albizzi patrons and their source of wealth' (2011: 85-86). Namesake saints relevant to the Albizzi clan dominate the overall saint population of the painting, and furthermore, as Gordon notes, there are many symbols associated with the Arte della Lana that 'would have resonated with any Albizzi patrons' (2011: 85). Ultimately, Gordon does not dispute that the altarpiece was relevant to the 'marriage of the abbess' ceremony, and that at least part of its composition was organised according to who would access it (i.e., the nuns).³⁵ Nevertheless, she argues that the San Pier Maggiore altarpiece was not commissioned by nuns, for nuns, but rather, it was a result of 'combined Albizzi' patronage in order to communicate the family's impressive wealth and perhaps more importantly, their association with the bishop of Florence at that time. The Virgin Mary, then, would not have served as a testament of female piety but instead, was part of a thematic composition recognisable to Florentines as a testament to the prominence of the Albizzi clan. The differences between King's and Gordon's interpretations of the desires behind the San Pier Maggiore altarpiece demonstrates

³⁴ For instance, she notes how Saint Peter takes a place of honour within the painting and whilst that does undoubtedly represent the dedication of the church, St. Peter was also the namesake for a wealthy member of the Albizzi, Piero di Filippo degli Albizzi (d. 1379). Similarly, Saint Bartholomew is depicted: Bartolomeo di Gherardo degli Albizzi (d. 1385) was another wealthy family member whose daughter, Andrea, was a nun at San Pier Maggiore; Bartolomeo di Niccolò degli Albizzi (d. 1381) had a son closely associated with the Benedictines and two daughters, Paola and Antonia, who were also nuns; Bartolomeo di Bellincione degli Albizzi (d. 7 July 1400) was married to Maddalena di Talento, whose namesake, Mary Magdalene features prominently in the front row. Also notable is the appearance of Saint Stephen, 'who was patron saint of the Arte della Lana, the Wool Guild', of which all of the Albizzi above were a part.

³⁵ In a lecture given at the National Gallery in London on 16/9/11, Gordon suggested that the placement of all of the female saints down the sides of the painting might have enabled the nuns to more easily and readily identify them.

the challenges scholars face when trying to interpret images of the Virgin Mary within historical schemas of meaning. It is not impossible to suggest that the Benedictine nuns did indeed see a parallel between their abbess and the Virgin as she sat in front of the *Coronation of the Virgin* during the 'marriage of the abbess' ceremony. However, Gordon's convincing analysis prevents a reading that links the nun's desires and perceptions with the patronage of the painting itself. The Virgin Mary in this case was more likely a symbol of familial piety (or pride) and thus, in its patronage, Cione's painting may have had little to do with women's desires. Thus the popularity of the theme the Coronation of the Virgin within religious art cannot be taken as evidence of women's growing participation (Rigaux 1999: 73). Nor is the Virgin indicative of women's visibility in the *trecento* owing to the fact that her materialisation may have had nothing to do with real women at all.

It is notable that the ways in which women became more visible in art during the *trecento* were in fact quite separate from the traditional figures of Eve, the serpent, Death, the devil and the Virgin. For the first time, women in their 'domestic' capacities began to make an appearance in *trecento* art. This change is not only important insofar as it provides historians with evidence for women's participation in Florentine life; it is also an indicator of the growing space within the production of art for women. Recognising the visibility of real women within art helps us to see how women's commissions were increasingly possible throughout the *trecento*. Frugoni notes that the added 'public dimension' of 'house-wifely virtues' was due in large part to the mercantile expansion of Italian cities beginning in the thirteenth century (1992: 390-391).³⁶ As commerce grew and expanded past the walls of Florence, merchants compensated for their absences by relying on their wives to work in and run the family business. *Trecento* miniatures depict women working in markets selling fish, or employed as seamstresses, cutting and sewing clothes (*ibid.*, 391-392). Images of women as carers or healers are also prevalent beginning in the thirteenth century. Frugoni observes that '[there] are countless examples of images of anonymous women nursing the sick in a hospital or hospice, making beds, or helping invalids eat' (1992: 392-393). One example is a triptych painted c. 1367 by Guisto de' Menabuoi depicting the Coronation of the Virgin, scenes from the lives of

³⁶ See also Opitz 1992: 292-303.

Joachim and Anna, and from the Life of the Virgin.³⁷ Although these scenes narrate the lives of holy figures, they nevertheless depict practices regularly undertaken by *trecento* women. On the exterior of the right wing, the central scene depicts *The Birth of the Virgin*; it illuminates the realities of *trecento* birthing chambers wherein only women were permitted (Fig. 8). As Gordon observes, ‘Anna washes her hands and is brought chicken to eat, while a midwife begins to unwind the swaddling clothes from the baby Mary in preparation for her bath’ (2011: 264). These details depict women’s activities in ways which are more representative of lived experiences. Cole similarly describes birthing chamber scenes: ‘[such] domestic scenes afford rare glimpses into the intimate setting of the birth chamber. The mother is the center of attention; she is visited by friends and attended by servants, who bring her food on trays’ (1987: 49). These types of images were not entirely free from denigrating discursive constructions of ‘Woman’. As I discussed in Chapter Three, writers like Francesco da Barberino thought so little of middle to lower-middle class women (like those that would have worked in markets or as seamstresses) that he hardly even bothered to include them amongst his classification schemas. Further, women as healers—like the midwives depicted in the Menabuoi triptych—were often viewed with suspicion. Frugoni suggests that the line between healer or midwife and enchantress or witch was often very thin (1992: 385-387).³⁸ Nevertheless, what is important to note is the growing appearance of women performing tasks, having jobs, and inhabiting public spaces in ways that were not necessarily dictated entirely by archetypal constructions of ‘Woman’. The trend of depicting women as part of everyday Florentine life must certainly be read as contributing to the widening possibilities for women’s participation in the making of religious art (Frugoni 1992: 422). Although, as I shall show in the cases examined below, women’s adherence to, and embodiment of, normative standards of virtue was a necessary precondition for their commissions, the growing commonality of the appearance of regular women within artistic representations cannot be ignored. The ‘right to appear’ in images, beginning in the thirteenth century and flourishing in the fourteenth, was a critical change within the landscape of religious art and

³⁷ Currently in the National Gallery in London, labelled as NG701.

³⁸ For examples of other studies centred on images of woman as healers see Harper 2011 and Brooke 1995.

generated space for women to begin to depict themselves in ways which were not *unorthodox*, but which were representative of their desires.

(iv) *Boundaries of Orthodoxy*

The last general observation to be made about *trecento* religious art involves the ways in which ecclesiastical definitions of orthodoxy informed the generation and veneration of art, even pieces commissioned for personal use. Although some feminist studies of women's participation in art have suggested that moments of subversion or disruption can be located in their commissions, it is critical to recall that the subjects of commissions, even those which were personal, were informed by the limits of orthodoxy (Kieckhefer 1987: 101). As I have discussed previously, definitions of orthodoxy, in part, formed the framework around what was knowable and around who could know. These types of limits were, of course, dynamic and porous but variations of definitions of orthodoxy are never radically different, one from the next. In Butlerian terms, as versions of orthodoxy manifest, the reiterative process creates minute difference between copies; space begins, almost imperceptibly, to form between performances such that difference appears, is absorbed, and a new rendition of what is orthodox is set in motion. For *trecento* Florentines, the limitations around the range of subjects available to draw upon for personal commissions were perceived of as natural, they represented what was knowable about salvation. Thus, women's commissions, even when rendered in somewhat unique ways, were still informed by and in support of ecclesiastical definitions of orthodoxy. As Bornstein suggests, within *trecento* Florence,

Ecclesiastical institutions continued to be the leading patrons of the arts, as they had been ever since the fourth century; and even when laymen commissioned works of art, whether for placement in a church or for private devotional use, the form and content of those works were defined by established religious traditions.

(1996: 1-2)³⁹

As well as the more subtle ways in which definitions of orthodoxy formed limits around what could be known, and therefore what kinds of art could be produced, there were also more obvious consequences for Florentines accused of heterodoxy. The legacy of the Dominicans in particular lingered into the *trecento* such that

³⁹ See also Frugoni (1992: 375-376).

accusations of heresy were still a very real threat. Those accused of heretical behaviour or thinking were faced not only with social exclusion but also often corporal punishment. For women specifically, this frequently meant being accused of witchcraft, a crime punishable by death. For instance, Frugoni points towards the sermons of Franciscan Bernardino di Siena, who was 'one of the great propagators of [the] obsession' with witches, '[he] personally condemned a great number of hapless women to the flames and made it his vocation to reconstruct and circulate...many characteristic habits of witches' (1992: 382-383). Form and content of personal commissions were therefore only ever so unique; orthodoxy dictated criteria that one could live or die by. Investigations of women's participation within art therefore, must avoid the temptation to characterise commissions as radically different or extraordinary; to make such an assertion would be to ignore the real dangers women faced when navigating the parameters of ecclesiastical orthodoxy.

An analysis of women's participation in the making and veneration of some types of religious art is necessarily informed by the observations made above. In a society in which discourses informed by theological virtues occasioned damaging modes of embodiment for women such that their marginalisation and subjugation materialised in conjunction with normative ideals, the performativity of art must be examined as integral to these processes. Whether religious art took the form of a wedding gift, a home altar, or a frescoed wall, a large part of its purpose was to instruct and inform its audience in theology, virtues, or social 'norms'. Alternatively, *trecento* Florentines relied on the utility of some types of religious art to express piety, to excite mystical experiences, or as is the case with women's commissions, to make their bodies (even after death) more visible and therefore, to provide a conduit for inhabiting a subject position capable of achieving salvation. These effects became possible for women for reasons including, but not limited to the emphasis on the humanity and bodily suffering of Christ; and the ways in which real women became increasingly visible in art, thus altering the association of women in art solely with archetypes like Eve or the Virgin. As the following examples will demonstrate, women's commissions were informed by *trecento* discourses of salvation; the very same discourses which brought about their marginalisation, subjugation and, in some cases, bodily degradation. Paradoxically, however, doctrines of salvation also produced normative ideals for modes of embodiment

such that Christ's humanity became of central importance to *trecento* Florentines. As this element of Christianity evolved, the suffering and fallibility of Christ's human flesh infused definitions of orthodoxy, ushering women into roles of religious participation. The ways in which women used religious art is remarkable not because their commissions were subversive or disruptive of Christian discourse; the form and content of surviving art associated with women reinforced, at least in some respects, doctrinal norms. Rather, women's commissions of religious art are consequential because they testify to women's agential actions insofar as works were produced in ways which brought women closer to more normative subject positions; positions wherein women's desires for salvation could be attained.

CHAPTER SIX

THREE CASE STUDIES

Much of what can be said about women's commissions in fourteenth-century Florence results from contextual social histories and studies of iconography, owing in large part to a lack of evidence. Surviving documents from the *trecento* rarely specify the patron's desires for the content of the commission and instead, as discussed by Warr, the contracts to which we have access 'are more likely to stipulate the method of payment to the artist, the colours to be used, or the size of the work, as well as the envisaged completion date rather than the subject matter and any particular reasons that there may have been for its selection' (1994: 12-13). Thus, in many cases, it is only possible to develop theories about who the patron of a particular work was, what her circumstances were such that she was in a position to make a commission, and why she might have elected the subjects she did. For many of the works outlined below, patronage is fairly ambiguous and within current art historical scholarship, many theories exist regarding who might have been responsible for their production. Nonetheless, examining some examples of women's commissions can further elucidate the ways in which women attempted to negotiate their embodied subjectivities. It is precisely because of this frequent ambiguity that I have chosen to analyse commissions containing donor portraits. Although portraits do not always point towards a knowable Florentine woman (we may discover her name but often, little else is traceable about her life), they do indicate a woman's initiative to produce the piece, and further, enable us to assess how these pieces 'spoke' about and to women.¹ Further, I have maintained a sole focus on Florentine commissions specifically because of the narrow circumstances under which Florentine women were allowed (or disallowed) to participate in the making of ritual art. As Samuel Kline Cohn has argued, women of *trecento* Florence were some of the most legally and financially restricted in Tuscany (1992: 195-200).

¹In her discussion of Saint Humility and the resultant altarpiece, for instance, Warr suggests that '[because] she herself was a woman, because the commissioner was a woman, because the recipients of many of her miraculous interventions were women, the iconography of the altarpiece was designed to privilege women viewers' (2000: 297). As a result, certain facts can be gleaned about the various ways women communicated through artistic commissions.

Their remarkably 'inferior positioning' in Florentine society meant that women had to negotiate religious and legal norms in ways very dissimilar to women in other *trecento* Tuscan city-states. Finally, it is also important to recognise that the women with whom this chapter deals were wealthy, despite their restricted social access. The power which came with being part of the Florentine patriciate meant, therefore, that in many ways women patrons were exceptional. Their access to patronage was of course limited compared to that of Florentine men; nevertheless, working women, women of the lower classes, and slaves were denied access to patronage entirely. This lacuna in my research therefore is the consequence of a lack of source material: from the fourteenth century, we have no surviving records, nor works of art that are indicative of a patron from anything other than the upper-classes.

In light of all the restrictions we may historically locate on women's patronage, it is also useful to outline some of the hallmarks of women's commissions that help to affirm women's possibilities for patronage. King outlines several factors which, when combined, make it likely that a patron was a woman: first, a woman's marital status was of primary importance. Although wives could act as patrons, they are understood generally to be less active resulting from their need to gain permission, and supervision, from their husbands. Thus, widows who, as King argues, 'had more freedom in law' are more often candidates for patronage (1998: 2-3). As mentioned above, for Florentine women, civic and legal statutes were more restrictive of their patronage than were the local restrictions for other Tuscan women and thus, the scale of women's commissions in Florence are frequently less grand and less public in nature. Women, for instance, would almost never be responsible for governmental patronage (King gives the example of a civic fountain), they would be largely prohibited from participating in the creation of a guild hall, and although women might lend their support to the patronage of a convent or religious institution, they would likely never be able to commission family chapels (*ibid.*, 6-7). When women were involved in the commissioning of family chapels, they were usually only *acting* patrons; in other words, they were frequently carrying out the wishes of a deceased male relative. In these instances, King suggests, that although it is not always the case, women might be identified as patrons because of the incorporation of a 'feminine' element manifested either by the iconographic presence of female religious figures, or more reliably, by the inclusion of a woman's

natal family arms.² It is also the case that women's patronage frequently took place as part of their funerary bequests. For many of the surviving works of women's commissions, the only extant documentation is funerary records. Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, many Florentines were keen to lessen their time in purgatory and so they rid themselves of excess wealth at the end of their lives by bequeathing funds to religious communities for the commissioning of ritual art (Cohn 1992: 203-271). Lastly, women's access to patronage was dependent upon their devoutness and upon their public reputation for piety in life. Visually, this manifested in women's funerary portraits following certain conventions which conveyed devotion deemed appropriate for a woman: as King notes, laywomen were frequently portrayed 'as looking away from the viewer, and usually showing only a part of their body' where as laymen were often pained 'as rapt in prayer or gazing boldly out at the viewer' (1998: 7). When examining ritual art therefore, it is possible to suggest a woman patron by the visual representation of an 'appropriately' pious female figure, often dressed as a widow or sometimes as part of a religious community. Women are more likely patrons of pieces which were intended for private use (although few of these exist), or at most, semi-public use.³ The presence of a 'feminine' element, represented by female religious figures or by natal family arms also frequently indicate women patrons, and finally, ritual art commissioned as part of funerary bequests is also a common source for exploring women's patronage. Although this loose formula for confirming women's artistic commissions is not fool proof, the case studies presented in this chapter affirm that for *trecento* Florentine women, access to patronage was frequently contingent upon marital status, a pious reputation, relegation to a more private space and usually, death.

The structure of this chapter divides roughly into two parts: the first part focuses critically on Cordelia Warr's analyses of the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility*. I conduct a careful reading of Warr's work in particular because, while her research is a strong example of feminist analysis of women's patronage, it

² For a study which echoes King's suggestion that it is possible to trace women's patronage through the presence of a 'feminine' element, see Eckstein 2005.

³ King explains that although women might commission pieces which appear in public places, access to these commissions would still largely be restricted to family (as is the case in a family chapel) or men and women religious (1998: 6-8).

nonetheless demonstrates a binary structure of critique that I find problematic within scholarly investigations of *trecento* women's expressions of agency. I show instead that in framing the Humility altarpiece in terms of 'collusion or subversion', Warr misses more subtle and complex manifestations of women's agency within ritual art commissions and I offer an alternative reading of the Humility altarpiece that avoids framing the patron's spiritual desires in terms of either passive acquiescence or subversive disruption. My purpose in the first half of this chapter therefore, is to highlight a problem I have observed in some feminist historical scholarship, and to provide a model for a different way of reading women's agency within fourteenth-century Florence. The second part of the chapter builds on this model and provides two further examples of *trecento* Florentine commissions made by women. In more specific terms, by investigating the three pieces below, I argue that agency for *trecento* Florentine women meant the pursuit of their desires which were not desires for greater social 'liberties' or 'freedoms' but for salvation. Women's commissions of religious art present, I suggest, one of the vehicles for Florentine women to gain easier access to salvation. Indeed, as Rigaux asserts, '[works] of art were a means to salvation for those who commissioned them. Did not the offer of a decorated chapel, an altarpiece, or a statue to a church or monastery mean that one's body and soul were assured of perpetual prayer and intercession?' (1999: 72). Seen in this light, works of religious art can be analysed in order to further explore the ways women—who were marginalised within and erased from Florentine life by soteriological discourses—attempted to move towards, and inhabit normative subject positions by commissioning works that, in their composition, placed them closer to Christ, and that literally directed the focus of devotion towards their bodies. The examples of women's commissions presented below also help to demonstrate the ways in which the boundaries of orthodoxy were stretched insofar as women's embodiment became central to (rather than at the margins of) certain rituals, and were highly visible (rather than entirely invisible) within some works of religious art. These commissions were not subversive of dominant discourses; in their subject matter they were entirely adherent to ecclesiastical norms. Nevertheless, these instances of women's participation in the production of art impacted changes to the discourses such that women were able—even if only in death—to claim access to salvation.

I. The Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility as a Model

The life of the Blessed Humility, born Rosanese dei Negusanti (d. 1310), was recorded in two fourteenth-century *vitae* which survive today, one in Latin and one in the vernacular (Warr 2000: 270; 1994: 147-148).⁴ In addition to these texts, Humility's miraculous life is also visible in Pietro Lorenzetti's *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility*, painted c. 1340, for the altar of the church of St. John the Evangelist in Florence (Fig. 9).⁵ The central panel features Humility herself (with a kneeling donor at her feet), whilst the side panels depict thirteen scenes from her life. Along the predella are tondoes featuring Christ, the Virgin, and five saints; and on the three remaining pinnacles are the evangelists Mark, John and Luke (Fossi 2009: 60).⁶ However, as Warr suggests, 'as must be always the case in "translating" from text to image, large areas of Humility's life have been left on the cutting-room floor' (1994: 270-274). The thirteen scenes chosen for the polyptych do not include, for instance, the twelve years Humility spent as a recluse or the founding of her first convent, Santa Maria della Malta, in Faenza (Petroff 1979: 127-128). As shall become apparent, the selections and omissions made for this commission are notable for the ways they point towards the desires of the patron. The kneeling figure at Humility's feet, presumably the patron herself, is also of interest. Although the kneeling woman is traditionally believed to be St. Margaret (d. 1330),⁷ 'the second abbess' of the Vallambrosan convent at the church of St. John the Evangelist,⁸ Warr argues that the dress of the patron points instead towards a wealthy lay woman (2000: 296-298).

⁴ The Latin has been attributed to Biagio, a Vallombrosan monk, and the vernacular version is attributed to Silvestro Ardenti (Warr 2000: 270, n. 9). For a commonly referenced edition of both the Latin and the vernacular, see Simonetti 1995. For an English translation see Petroff 1979. An additional contemporary textual source discussing Humility's life and works (and specifically her sermons) is Mooney 1998: 123-144.

⁵ The altarpiece, or polyptych is currently divided between the Uffizi in Florence and Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (Fossi 2009: 60); (Warr 2000: 270).

⁶ Only eleven of the side panels depicting Humility's life are currently in the Uffizi, and the two remaining pinnacles featured Matthew in one, and Christ in the other (Warr 2000: 270). For a proposed sketch of the fully constructed altarpiece see Warr 2000: 271. For further discussion of the earliest sketch of the altarpiece by Carmichael, see Warr 1994: 144.

⁷ The Uffizi Gallery description states: 'At her feet, in the central panel, appears a saint, perhaps St. Margaret, second abbess of the convent, who died in 1330. It is thought that the work was commissioned by Margaret, but painted after her death' (Fossi 2009: 60). Warr also points towards R. Davidsohn's theory that the patron might have been Giovanna dei Tornaquinci (1965: 420).

⁸ Warr outlines the problems with historiographies describing Margaret as 'the second abbess'; further, she questions whether Margaret was indeed the patron (1994: 160-170).

These observations lead Warr to argue that rather than echo contemporary votive portraits, like those of Saint Clare, which depict a model of female sanctity centred on obedience, the Humility altarpiece harkens back to earlier medieval models of 'strong, independent abbesses'. The emphasis in the Humility altarpiece, Warr asserts, is 'on the way in which Humility circumvents the constraints placed on her because of her sex and on her thaumaturgical powers' (2000: 269). Furthermore, she concludes:

There is a strong relationship between location, commissioner, iconography and audience...The powerful and self-directed woman present in the panels should not be dismissed as a figment of the modern imagination. The *Saint Humility Polyptych* is one of the last representations to celebrate the powerful abbesses of the late Middle Ages, a type which had been already largely superseded by the self-immolating female saint who began to appear in the thirteenth century.

(2000: 297)

Warr's scholarship makes for a strong case concerning the patronage of the Humility altarpiece. Nevertheless, I argue that in analysing the Humility altarpiece in opposition to the *Santa Chiara Dossal* (Fig. 10), Warr constructs a dichotomy between two models of female piety wherein Clare represents submission and obedience whilst Humility (as shown in the altarpiece) represents subversion and independence. Although Warr herself admits the difficulty in maintaining that the Humility altarpiece is an act of subversion, her conceptual structure of obedience versus independence makes it difficult to read the patron's desires in other, more nuanced terms. In the analysis that follows, I will first build upon and then depart from Warr's thesis in order to suggest an alternative reading of the patronage behind the Humility altarpiece.⁹

Despite the current configuration of the Humility altarpiece in the Uffizi (Fig. 9), Warr follows the narrative thread within Humility's *vitae* in order to describe the thirteen panels (2000: 274-283, n. 14):

Beginning at the top left, we see Humility...persuading her husband, Ugolotto dei Caccianemici, to allow them to separate so that she can follow a holy life. She is then shown watching while her husband takes the habit having already received her own, reading to nuns in the refectory of the convent of Santa Perpetua despite being illiterate, and miraculously leaving Santa Perpetua and crossing the river Lamone with dry feet. The second register

⁹ To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that I propose an alternative theory of whom the patron might have been; instead, I am interested in rethinking how we might understand what the selections made for the altarpiece might have meant to the woman responsible.

begins with a monk refusing to have his gangrenous leg amputated, Humility healing the monk, leaving Faenza and arriving at the gates of Florence, and reviving a child. On the bottom register the saint helps to build her new church and convent, dictates her sermons inspired by the Holy Spirit, and heals a nun of a nosebleed which doctors had been unable to cure. The final two scenes relate the miraculous discovery of ice in August that Humility had requested when ill, and the translation of her body by the bishop of Florence on 6 June 13.¹⁰

As Warr demonstrates, this particular collection of scenes from Humility's *vita* does not constitute the sum total of the miracles she performed, nor all the various phases in her spiritual life. Although the panels depict miracles that would have been easily recognised as saintly by their viewing audience, Warr notes the inclusion of numerous scenes that 'diverge from ecclesiastical regulations and hagiographical expectations' (2000: 286). For instance, Humility breaks cloister, she overrides male medical professionals, and she preaches. Thus rather than assuming that the altarpiece was simply a visual representation of Humility's *vita*, Warr suggests that the work was also meant to convey a particular theme, one which 'could be categorised as a breaking of boundaries' (*ibid.*). Even the physical structure of the altarpiece, Warr argues, subverts 'normal patterns of dominance and subordination' (1994: 171). According to the sketch of the altarpiece Warr asserts is most accurate, the central pinnacle above the vertical panel of Humility would have almost certainly portrayed the Saviour. 'Thus', Warr concludes, 'Humility is literally and figuratively directly below Christ and takes her justification from him without any intermediate human intervention. She has bypassed the normally prescribed hierarchy and, by means of her religious vocation, placed herself on a level with men' (1994: 141). From this perspective then, for Warr the altarpiece may be read as 'a subversive gesture in which the Saint is not shown as answerable to a male hierarchy' (Warr 1994: 173). This is in direct opposition to the *Santa Chiara Dossal* which Warr suggests offers a model of female piety rooted in obedience,

¹⁰ Warr justifies her configuration by pointing to the fact that 'the desire for accurate chronology is an anachronism in relation both to the *vitae* of many of the saints and beati at this period, and also their depiction' (1994: 157). Moreover, depictions of saint's lives 'militated against a purely chronological relation of the life in favour of one that joined together miracles of healings in one section and visions in another' (*ibid.*, 158). For further discussion on the organisation of *vitae* and the construction of sainthood during this time period, see Vauchez 1997.

dependence, and passivity.¹¹ In the Clare dossal, for example, we see panels depicting Clare receiving a palm from the Bishop of Assisi (bottom left), one wherein she receives Francis' blessing (left, second from bottom) and perhaps most notably, Clare's funeral scene which is attended entirely by male clergy (bottom right). Warr writes, 'These two saints [Humility and Clare] represent two distinct types of sanctity at what may be regarded as opposite ends of the scale' (1994: 174). While the Humility altarpiece emphasises the saint's independence and 'a negation of male supervisory power' (1994: 176), the *Chiara Dossal* illustrates Clare's obedience and places an 'emphasis on her dependence on the support of the Franciscan order' (1994: 179). Clare's close ties to the Franciscan order are evident in the sheer number of times a male authority figure appears in the dossal—in almost every single panel—and in comparison to the Humility altarpiece, where there are a handful of panels without male ecclesiasts, it is tempting to agree with Warr's conclusion that these images are in opposition to one another. However, as I shall demonstrate shortly, this binarised reading fails to take into account many of the ways in which these works of art function similarly. Rather than being reflective of typical models of female piety, Warr argues that the Humility altarpiece is more reminiscent of 'the great abbesses':

The Saint Humility polyptych contrasts significantly with the other extant cycles of the lives of contemporary female saints in Tuscany and Umbria that have survived on panels(?), as tombs or in frescoes, in that it seems radically to assert her independence, her freedom of movement, and her direct accountability to God. [...] [The altarpiece] seems not to regard approval or disapproval by any mortal agency.

(1994: 192-193)

Therefore, Warr concludes, the model explored in the Humility altarpiece is 'one of the last representations to celebrate the powerful abbesses of the Middle Ages, a type which had been already largely superseded by the self-immolating female saint' (2000: 297).¹² As mentioned previously, I agree with much of Warr's analysis, even to the point that I echo many of her conclusions about 'women's increasing interest in forming their own religious experiences' (1994: 192). Nevertheless, I find the

¹¹ Warr also compares the *vita* of Saint Humility to that of Saint Margaret of Cortona in order to solidify her arguments about Humility's independence and activity in contrast to the established female model of obedience and passivity (1994: 174-184).

¹² For further discussion of female models of sanctity see Vauchez 1993: 171-183; for a similar discussion of Tuscany in particular see Benvenuti Papi 1996: 84-103.

means by which Warr reaches those ends unsatisfactory primarily because of her reliance on a reading of women's agency (as expressed through their artistic commissions) as either subversive of or collusive with dominant religious discourses.

(i) *A Constructive Critique*

Although we do not have documentation that records the patron's precise wishes, nor her exact intentions for commissioning this altarpiece, it is still possible to theorise about some potential meanings behind the commission. Warr highlights a number of possibilities: first, she suggests that the Humility altarpiece could be read as centred on the theme of 'breaking boundaries'. Second, she argues that the selection of scenes from Humility's life point towards an emphasis on disregarding or superseding male ecclesiastical authority (and therefore, by extension, implies that the patron herself wished to convey her own disregard for this authority). Third, Warr states that the physical structure of the commission supports the theory that the patron wished to convey Humility's direct relationship with Christ and therefore to place herself on par with men. Finally, Warr asserts that this commission may be read as a subversive action by the woman patron. However, I find her terms too polarising and the theoretical framework within which she has placed the Humility altarpiece—a binary structure placing the subversive Humility commission up against the compliant Clare dossal—is not sustainable in many ways. Phrases such as 'breaking boundaries' imply on the one hand, that it was possible to undertake radical departures from dominant religious discourses, and on the other hand, that the patron desired to do so and thus did so deliberately. I have, in previous chapters, discussed the ways in which a reading of religious discourses as performative prevents the characterisation of women's actions as 'breaking' with normative ideals; through their iteration, discourses vary and change, but to suggest that it is possible for one to think in ways entirely divorced from dominant discourses is contradictory to the nature of discourse itself. Further, to place oneself outside of the discursive boundaries of what can be known is to occupy an unintelligible space. In terms of fourteenth-century Florence, Warr herself discusses how 'behaviour that was felt to be seditious in the society of the time' would be

‘undoubtedly [perceived] as heretical’ (1994: 183), a positioning that could have life-threatening implications. A commission that truly broke away from the boundaries of orthodoxy would also, in all likelihood, have never been produced or at the very least, it would have been kept from display. As King points out, a woman’s ability to commission was dependent on her choices being deemed ‘properly pious’ (1992: 372). In more practical terms, Julian Gardner points to the reality that from the thirteenth century, ‘altars, the mass, and its celebration procedures were all regulated by canon law, in the first instance, and local custom or convention secondarily’ (1994: 6).¹³ A woman’s commission could not be only about her own intentions and desires, for an altarpiece there were also ecclesiastical legal boundaries that, if broken, would have prevented its production. Patricia Rubin builds on this argument, for example, by highlighting the importance of *uso commune* in the composition and arrangement of figures where ‘Liturgical demands had to be accommodated in invention’ (1994: 203).¹⁴ Whatever the patron’s desires, rendering them in the form of an altarpiece that would be venerated publically meant that the piece had to be intelligible to the worshipping community. A final practical consideration is the process by which women were able to execute their commissions. Even in the case of a ‘wealthy lay woman’, the contract would have been recorded by a man and then conveyed to a male artist who often had to confirm their designs with a church official (Rubin 1994: 203).¹⁵ Under these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine that a bequest which truly ‘broke’ the boundaries of what was ‘fittingly feminine’ (to borrow King’s phrase), would have been executed at all. Whilst it is not my intention to quibble over the terms ‘breaking’ or ‘broke’, I think it is important to analyse critically how the need to frame women’s patronage

¹³ Gardner does admit that this combination of ‘canon law and local custom’ was sometimes rather fluid and depending on the location and time period, the latter may have been more important than the former. Nonetheless, she argues that the regulations surrounding altarpieces should not be abandoned when considering their historical context and the meaning of their iconography (1994: 5-18). For an additional discussion of the ‘requirements’ of altarpieces, see Hope 1990: 535-571.

¹⁴ Here again, Rubin discusses the shifts in purpose of altarpieces such that by the sixteenth century, it is possible to see how an altarpiece ‘*could be* the fantasy (*carpriccio*) of its author’, rather than a purely ‘liturgical, devotional, and theological’ object’ (1994: 202). It is helpful to keep this shift in mind as it affirms that a patron’s desires were an element in the equation of constructing an altarpiece although it was not until much later that they became a priority.

¹⁵ See also Glasser 1977; King 1995: 243.

behaviours in terms of subversive action obscure *trecento* women's own desires as well as the ways their expressions of agency were bounded by religious discourses.¹⁶ Florentine women were undeniably marginalised and erased from many, many aspects of *trecento* life but to suggest that their commissions were subversive of dominant religious discourses—and therefore of orthodoxy—would be to deny their desires for salvation. As Rubin points out, commissioning an altarpiece was first and foremost an 'implementation of piety...Buying an altarpiece was buying into eternity' (1994: 204).

In addition to this handful of historical factors, that would have literally prevented a *trecento* Florentine woman patron from 'breaking' the boundaries of orthodoxy, there are also elements within the commission itself that undermine its supposed 'subversiveness'. Warr uses the panel featuring Humility's preaching as one example of the patron's desire to break away from the model of female piety as exhibited by Clare in the *Santa Chiara Dossal*. Humility's preaching exemplifies an active piety whilst Clare's submission to Franciscan authorities demonstrates a passive piety. Curiously, Warr recognises that although the preaching panel may depict a rare occurrence, it cannot actually be characterised as subversive:

The taint of subversion is further removed by showing Humility speaking to an audience of fellow nuns in a cloistered setting. This accords with Saint Thomas Aquinas' view that women may only exercise their gifts of speech in the private sphere.

(2000: 289-290)

It is interesting to note firstly the connotations Warr sets forth by employing the phrase 'the taint of subversion'. The implication here is that she knows all too well what that kind of characterisation might mean for the patron during the time of her commissioning; any hint of heterodoxy would have meant the pollution of piety. Further, although it is important to note the appearance of Humility preaching, and to note how that *stretches* definitions of female piety, it is nevertheless the case that the scene falls within the boundaries of ecclesiastically sanctioned action. According to Aquinas, it is entirely appropriate for women to speak within a private sphere; in this way, one might argue that the Humility altarpiece upholds the contemporary

¹⁶ This tendency is not limited to Warr's analyses. Cynthia Lawrence writes, '[in] many cases...commissions by female patrons appear to intentionally subvert or reinvent traditional categories in order to achieve a more personal statement, one that reflected their own situations or convictions' (1997: 10).

model of female sanctity which Warr asserts is only apparent in the Clare dossal. Specifically, by depicting Humility's preaching behind convent walls, women's spiritual embodiment is being removed from the public sphere and thus made appropriately invisible to men. Another aspect the Humility piece shares with the Clare dossal, as opposed to being radically different from it, is the appearance of miracles that were most characteristic of women's modes of piety. In the Clare dossal we see Clare performing a food multiplication miracle, a popular type of miracle for women particularly.¹⁷ Humility is depicted as curing illnesses, most notably of a fellow nun and a child; Warr states that these panels 'address contemporary women through Humility's power over their illnesses and those of their children' (2000: 292).¹⁸ Although Humility is actually shown raising the child from the dead, a rare miracle for any saint—woman or man—and therefore exhibits pious action that expands the female model represented in the Clare dossal, it becomes increasingly difficult to suggest that they are in stark opposition to one another. In some scenes, Humility is depicted performing in ways which wholly adhere to the same female model of sanctity demonstrated by the *Santa Chiara Dossal*. Further, the model of Humility in association with illness and food cannot be characterised as subversive because of the ways women's embodiment was theologically linked to the failure of the flesh and the material; in this way, Humility's miracles would have been deemed appropriate because of her femaleness.

Although Humility's other actions, like leaving her convent, or performing medical miracles in spite of male doctors' inability to cure their patients, are unusual, they are nonetheless all informed by 'divine approbation'. These panels which depict actions that seem to supersede all human legislation prominently point towards 'divine support' (Warr 2000: 289). On the one hand, Humility's direct communion with God through John the Evangelist does portray a novel female proximity to the divine. On the other hand, the intercession of John does reinforce divine authority as male. Humility's actions, even when they expand discursive definitions of femininity, still reinforce the male religious voice as the norm. I agree

¹⁷ The definitive source on this is, of course, Bynum 1987. Although it is not depicted in the altarpiece, Humility's *vitae* also describe a food miracle in which the saint multiplies a single fish into a meal for her entire convent; see Petroff 1979: 128.

¹⁸ Further discussion of illness as being particularly significant to women's religious experiences can be found in Bynum 1989: 166-167; Weinstein and Bell 1986: 234-235; Petroff 1986: 37-44; Kieckhefer 1984: 57-58.

with Warr when she points to the proximity of the portrait of Humility to the (now missing) portrait of Christ as being indicative of the donor's desires to place Humility 'on par' with men. I concur that one of the ways women expressed their agency was by visually aligning their bodies with the body of Christ. However, it is crucial to recall with Bynum, that although the 'flesh' of Christ often 'fluidly' combined 'gender imagery', and 'women could fuse with Christ's body because they *were* in some sense body', they 'never forgot the maleness of Christ' (1989: 188).¹⁹ Whereas Warr characterises the patron's choice to depict Humility as 'on a level with men' as subversive, I argue that it is perfectly in line with discursive norms which valorised upper-class men's religious embodiment at the expense of the corporeal identities of women. Warr argues that by harkening back to the powerful abbesses of the Middle Ages, the Humility altarpiece valorises an independent model of womanhood which subverts and disregards male ecclesiastical authority. Unfortunately, Warr fails to take into account the ways in which medieval abbesses were appropriated by religious male authorities such that their models of piety were made to uphold the superiority of maleness, rather than to undermine it.

Indeed, in some cases women like Hildegard of Bingen might be described as 'honorary males'. These women exhibited extraordinary experiences of the divine and held almost unprecedented power amongst their female peers. It is amongst these women that Warr undoubtedly situates Humility and whilst I do not wish to diminish the achievements of these abbesses, it is necessary to recognise that much of what Hildegard, for example, did was framed in ways which did not subvert dominant gender norms. By characterising powerful religious women as 'honorary males', ecclesiastical authorities were ensuring that men remained superior and that their religious experiences served as the norm. King states that '[the] dominant androcentric perspective required...that women of such strength of spirit were likened to be "as men" who had transcended what were perceived to be the innate limitations of womanhood' (1989: 100). In her discussion of women in the Middle Ages, Kimberly LoPrete analyses medieval perceptions of powerful women as

¹⁹ For more on the flesh of Christ in relation to gender and sex in the Middle Ages, see Bynum 1982; 1991. For a contrasting perspective see Steinberg 1996: 364-389.

viragos (2005: 17-38).²⁰ She writes that 'the term virago, in fact infrequently evoked, was used most often by medieval authors to praise lordly women who wielded authoritative powers that were generally conceived as male' (2005: 21). She goes on to clarify that even though the term was rarely used in medieval sources, 'it is undeniable that powerful women frequently were described as acting "manfully" (*viriliter*) in some way, or with some kind of "manly" (*virilis*) verve, spirit, or strength (whether physical, emotional, or intellectual)' (*ibid.*).²¹ Humility's hagiographer(s) did not describe her as an 'honorary male', nor as a virago but even in likening her to the 'powerful independent abbesses' of the Middle Ages, one must be aware of the ways these types of women were perceived. Although a modern scholar may find the life of Hildegard exceptional, and may be tempted to interpret her example as subversive of gender norms, those interpretations must be tempered with the realisation that for medieval people themselves, the model of the 'powerful abbess' may simply have confirmed men's religious experiences as the ideal. Even if we return to Bynum's assertion that medieval thinkers used 'gender imagery fluidly', and that the human being was perceived of as a mix of male and female, it is nevertheless the case that maleness translated into superior and therefore that men's embodiment was constructed as more ideal. Bynum writes: 'From the patristic period on, those who saw the female as representing flesh, while the male symbolized spirit, wrote of real people as both. To say this is not to deny that men were seen as superior in rationality and strength. Clearly they were' (1989: 186).

²⁰ For further discussion of LoPrete's essay within its scholarly context, see Chapter One: Section Two of this thesis.

²¹ LoPrete also clarifies that when these types of descriptions were applied to women, '[the] accolade did not detract from the fundamental "femininity" and child-bearing value of those women in the eyes of their male contemporaries; that is, they were still expected to adhere to the same behavioural standards as all other lay women and were judged largely in terms of traditionally "feminine" virtues' (2005: 21). Her main argument is that the use of this term did not 'turn strong women into men or into an unnatural hybrid species of "man-woman"' (*ibid.*). I feel this is missing the point; of course labelling a woman 'virago' did not 'detract' from her femininity precisely because her femininity was what should have anchored her in a marginalised role. When women exceeded their marginalisation, strategies such as the use of terms like 'honorary male', or 'virago', served on the one hand to reinforce men as spiritual and political authorities, and on the other hand, to emphasise the inherent inferiority of 'normative' femininity such that a woman's powerful actions could *only* be understood in terms of maleness. What LoPrete fails to see are the ways these terms normalised men's embodiment as ideal. For an alternative study which engages with medieval forms of 'female masculinity', and does so in a way which, arguably, succeeds in maintaining 'ambivalence', see Lochrie's, 'Amazons at the Gates' (2005: 103-138).

The point here, therefore, is that Warr's argument that the Humility altarpiece subverts and disregards male authority, on the grounds that Humility is most like the powerful abbesses of previous centuries, becomes contradictory when we recognise the ways that even the models of powerful abbesses were employed in order to reinforce normative gender roles and to privilege men's religious experiences.

Finally, it is not possible to say that the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility* entirely disregards male ecclesiastical authority—and therefore may be read as subversive. Interrelated with the arguments made above, I find it difficult to sustain Warr's reading of the Humility altarpiece as disregarding male religious authority in contrast to the Clare dossal which she suggests, submits to ecclesiastical authority. The difficulty lies primarily in the fact that the Humility altarpiece, like the Clare dossal, is modelled on male religious experience. More specifically, the Humility altarpiece is an example of *imitatio Christi*, a model which many women followed but which was also advocated as being especially appropriate for women by the ecclesiastical church. Moreover, *imitatio Christi* was made most popular in *trecento* Florence by Francis of Assisi; although the Humility altarpiece does not 'support' the Franciscan order as obviously as the Clare dossal, it nevertheless promotes a model of piety that was, in its dissemination throughout Florence, inextricably linked to Francis' experiences.²² That is not to say that the Humility altarpiece adheres strictly to the model of Francis, walking on water (second column from left, second panel from the bottom) and raising the dead (far left, bottom panel) are clearly specific to Jesus' life rather than to the *vita* of Francis (Fig. 9). It remains the case, however, that the familiarity of Christocentric models of piety to fourteenth-century Florentines would have stemmed at least in part from Francis, and therefore through an ecclesiastically-sanctioned order.

One other point must be made which complicates profoundly Warr's suggestion that the Humility altarpiece pays very little attention to male ecclesiastical authority. In the panel depicting the translation of Humility's body (Fig. 9, far right, bottom panel), the figures which gather around her are not all men (as is

²² Rigaux suggests that whilst the Clare dossal demonstrates a 'new prominence accorded to women' in the thirteenth century, '[its] precedent, however, is masculine, for the panel in fact follows the formula used for the altarpieces devoted to Saint Francis some forty years before' (1999: 74).

the case in the Clare dossal), however the vast majority are (most in habits or robes), and the figure that is most prominently pictured, aside from Humility herself, is the local bishop, Antonio d'Orso (Warr 2000: 294-295). In discussing the position of the polyptych, Warr refers to the two surviving fourteenth-century *vitae* of Humility:

In their description of Humility's translation in 1311, the two surviving fourteenth-century *vitae* agree that Humility's new tomb was the interior of an altar, thus supporting the assertions of later witnesses that the polyptych functioned as an altarpiece. [...] Theoretically, Humility was not entitled either to her own altar or altarpiece since she had not been officially canonized. However, it is clear that in this case, as in many others, the 'principle of pontifical reservation of the right of canonization' was ignored. Approval for Humility's cult came from the local bishop, Antonio d'Orso, rendered concrete in his decision to preside over the translation of her body in 1311. Humility was *de facto* recognized as and treated as a saint.

(2000: 294-295)

If the point of the altarpiece was truly to disregard male ecclesiastical authority, one wonders why the translation scene, featuring the local bishop who legitimated Humility's sanctity, made it into the polyptych. Again, it is not my intention to 'split hairs', but it would seem that this panel plays a very important role indeed. By including the translation scene, the altarpiece affirms the spiritual authority of Humility by providing proof that she was legitimated by the local bishop. It would seem that the very function of the polyptych in fact relied on ecclesiastical authority because in order to perform as an altarpiece, Humility would have had to be allowed an altar. I agree with Warr that the patron's desires in commissioning the Humility altarpiece were, in all likelihood, not parallel to those of the person (or persons) who commissioned the Clare dossal and who, according to Rigaux, likely had more to say 'about the cult than about the life of the woman herself' (1999: 74). However, I think it is problematic to suggest that the Humility altarpiece stands in stark opposition to the Clare dossal in its seeming disregard for male ecclesiastical authority. I think it is precisely in the ways the Humility patron capitalised on Humility's proximity to male ecclesiastical authority that we may be able to read her commission as expressive of her agency.

The primary purpose of my critique here is to problematise Warr's decision to analyse the Humility altarpiece in opposition to the Clare dossal, thereby constructing a binary framework of medieval women's patronage as either subversive of, or collaborative with dominant religious discourses which engendered damaging gender norms. I believe that in her attempts to understand

women's acts of patronage solely in terms of disruption or maintenance of male ecclesiastical authority, she obscures certain historical restrictions on women's modes of expression, she does not sufficiently acknowledge women's desires for the procurement of salvation by orthodox means, she fails to recognise the ways in which doctrines of salvation valorised men's religious embodiment and ultimately, the binary framework within which she situates her analysis cannot be sustained. In the following section, I will propose a reading of the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility* which builds on Warr's important work, but which is not restricted to interpreting the patron's desires only in terms of subversion or collusion. In fact, I argue that what is visible in the altarpiece are not only the ways in which the patron attempted to express her embodied agency, but also the ways dominant soteriological discourses engendered the simultaneous materialisation of women's bodies as 'damaged' alongside their desires for salvation. I suggest that by negotiating her own situatedness as 'woman', the patron was able to commission a piece that stretched the boundaries of that category and thereby pushed against orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy embodiment. Nonetheless, I take seriously the fact that as a result of the very same religious discourses that enabled the patron to stretch these boundaries, it was only in her death that she was able to express her agency.²³

(ii) *An Alternative Reading*

The identity of the patron of the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility* is still fairly contested. There are no extant records to confirm her identity however, because the polyptych contains a donor portrait, we may draw some conclusions about who she was and thus, about her position within Florentine society. Warr discusses the various theories of the identity of the patron including the most popular that the donor pictured is Margaret of Faenza, and the less widely-held belief that the portrait might be of Giovanna dei Tornaquinci (1994: 160-164). Warr challenges

²³ Although a woman must exhibit appropriate feminine virtues in life in order to gain access to the power of patronage, it was overwhelmingly the case that it was only her death that she was deemed sufficiently virtuous enough to have a hand in obtaining her own salvation. Confirming this assertion, Giurescu Heller writes, '[the] only time women could use their money according to their wishes (providing it had not been already spent by then) was on their deathbed: the archives of Florence are rich in female wills donating to churches, charitable institutions, or their relatives' (2005: 169).

both assumptions by building on the work of Carmichael (1913) who first noticed that the clothes of the patron do not match the habits worn by the nuns throughout the rest of the polyptych. She writes:

Carmichael believes that the donor is wearing a black cloak and scapular, a blue tunic and a white veil rather than what appears from the rest of the altarpiece to be the habit of the nuns of the order which is a brownish-grey tunic and mantle together with a black veil.

(1994: 164)

Warr elaborates on Carmichael's discussion of the veil by suggesting that the donor's white veil also does not match the white veils of the *serviziali*²⁴ pictured in other panels (for instance, Fig. 10, bottom central panel). It also does not match the white veils worn by the young, married women in the polyptych which leads Warr to suggest that the donor was a widow (Fig. 9, far left column, top panel). She explains that young married women typically wore 'only a loose headcovering', whereas the donor 'both because of age and convention wears both a wimple and a veil with which to cover her head more effectively' (1994: 169). Warr goes on to say that, '[married] women, whilst expected to cover their heads would not have been subject to the same strictures in dress as widows whose state was often considered to be similar to that of nuns' (*ibid.*). Warr concludes that the patron depicted in the polyptych was most likely a lay penitent 'who chose to rid herself of excess money and show her devotion by financing this work' (*ibid.*). This theory of patronage is particularly compelling within the context of Florence where widows had, usually for the first time in their lives, access to their dowries and were often recorded as using that wealth to support communities of women religious. Further, as I have discussed throughout this thesis, many Florentines struggled with the spiritual weight of their wealth and therefore opted to invest in art commissions specifically designed to elicit prayers and commemoration for their souls. If the patron was indeed a wealthy widow, who as a lay penitent was particularly devoted to the

²⁴ Warr clarifies that *serviziali* were lay sisters who often attended to the 'heavy work' within a convent and who, because they were not fully professed, could also leave the walls of the convent on errands for the nuns. According to Warr, 'they were also in almost all cases women of a lower social standing who could not raise the money almost certainly required to enter a convent as a novice but instead served God in more practical ways within the convent' (1994: 166-168). Moreover, owing to the typically lower-class status of *serviziali*, it is highly unlikely that the donor herself was this type of lay sister as the money needed to create 'such an ambitious altarpiece', would have far outstripped the resources these women had at their disposal. For further discussion of *serviziali* see Gennaro 1996: 45-46.

Vallombrosan community established by Humility, what was she trying to communicate about Humility, and by extension, about herself? What were her intentions for this commission and is it possible to read the altarpiece as an expression of agency?

The primary motivation for this commission (most likely) has already been stated: the patron wished to affect positively her own chances for salvation. She achieved this, at least in part, by ridding herself of excess wealth by paying for the piece, by charitably donating an altarpiece to the church of St. John the Evangelist, and by commissioning an object that would have been a regular part of worship and which therefore would have received the prayers of the religious community.²⁵ A secondary motivation, and one equally as plain as the first, was the patron's desire to demonstrate her devotion to, and veneration of the Blessed Humility. As Warr suggests, however, the iconography of the polyptych seems to imply more complex themes and desires which are interrelated, but not limited to, the motivations listed above. I argue that the Humility altarpiece conveys, on the one hand, dominant discursive categories of gendered embodiment and on the other hand, makes visible the ways the patron stretched, but did not transcend, the boundaries of those categories in her pursuit to achieve her desire for salvation.²⁶ The prevalence of Humility's engagement with illness and death within the polyptych is perhaps the best place to start. Six of the thirteen scenes depicted on the panels portray Humility in scenarios involving illness or death. Far from disrupting contemporary gender norms, these scenes affirm women's roles as carers, as well as their close bodily association with illness and death. Bynum asserts that 'illness or recurrent pain' were 'more apt to be given religious significance in women's lives than in men's'

²⁵ The extent to which this included the nuns is unclear. Often nuns were prevented from entering the main building of the church so as to avoid encountering lay men. Florentine synodal laws meant strict cloistering for nuns, even within convents, however most churches generally had a lofted choir that nuns could occupy during worship; see Trexler 1971: 92-98 and Brundage and Makowski 1994: 143-155. As Warr points out, however, the 'polysemy of the images' seems to address women most specifically, but 'not just lay women, or those from outside the convent, it was also relevant to the nuns' (2000: 296). Further, she argues that '[the] composition of the final panel reflects, in its viewpoint, Ardeni's description of the view from the nuns' choir and it is possible that when Humility's body was moved to the altar on the right of the church, shortly to be joined by the new altarpiece, that both were visible to the nuns' (*ibid.*).

²⁶ I am not suggesting that the patron consciously set out to 'stretch the categories of gender'; as I have argued, I believe the only conscious desires we can be reasonably sure about are the woman's desires for salvation.

(1989: 166).²⁷ The scene in which Humility cures the nun of a haemorrhaging nosebleed is particularly characteristic of approved models of women's sanctity during the fourteenth century (Fig. 10, central panel under the Humility portrait). As Bynum discusses, 'ecstatic nosebleeds are seldom if at all reported of male saints but are quite common in the *vitae* of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century women' (*ibid.*, 165). Although the polyptych does not portray the same type of 'obedience' Warr locates in the Clare dossal, it does, nonetheless, confirm certain discursive norms. What we see in the Humility altarpiece is not a departure from dominant discourses, but rather, a demonstration of how women's embodiment was materialised as intimately connected with, indeed perhaps more closely *associated* with illness and death. Nonetheless, Humility's miraculous encounters with ill or deceased Florentines are not strictly bound by discursive definitions of women's embodied identities, and in fact, several of the panels negotiate Humility's femaleness in ways that do not fully conform to gender norms. The most notable example is the panel in which Humility raises a young Florentine boy from the dead (Fig. 9, far left column, bottom panel). Warr suggests that this would have been particularly resonant for *trecento* Florentine women, owing to the common practices of employing wet nurses, and the knowledge of the potential dangers associated with their employment (2000: 292). The scene is not simply affirming women's roles as mothers (and therefore the theological assumptions of women's embodiment as being primarily intended for procreation), nor is its only purpose to alleviate fears about the use of wet nurses (Warr 2000: 292-293); the panel is also remarkable for the ways it directly aligns Humility with Christ. This point is examined by Warr herself who writes that this miracle 'echoes Christ's raising of Lazarus and the raising of Jairus's daughter' (*ibid.*, 290). She goes on to point at another panel in the altarpiece:

Another "Christ-like" miracle included on the polyptych is that where *Humility leaves the convent of Santa Perpetua and crosses the river Lamone with dry feet*, which calls to mind Christ walking on the water (John 6: 16-21). According to W. Miller, *The Franciscan Legend in Italian Painting of the Thirteenth Century* (Columbia University Ph.D., 1961), direct connections with the stories of Christ do not occur in painting before Saint Francis. The use of such miracles in the Humility Polyptych may reflect a need for an iconographical template for a subject never before depicted.

²⁷ This assertion is also confirmed by Petroff who notes that one of the two central images for women's bodies in devotional texts is illness (1986: 37-44).

The problem Warr runs into, I would suggest, is that this 'new template' is identified as being subversive of dominant religious discourses. In fact, the Humility polyptych upholds dominant discourses in many ways, certainly far more than it undermines them. Almost half of the scenes depict Humility doing deeds or performing miracles which were considered appropriate for 'woman'. The other half place an emphasis on Humility's likeness to Christ, and artistically, rely on the visual precedent of Francis in order to establish Humility as a model of *imitatio Christi*. These scenes should not be read, therefore, as disruptive of dominant soteriological discourses because (1) they maintain the male mode of religious embodiment as the desired ideal; (2) *imitatio Christi* was deemed an acceptable model of piety for women; and (3), the donor was undoubtedly interested in ensuring her salvation, not disrupting it. The altarpiece does stretch orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy embodiment, however. Despite women's embodiment being discursively constructed as making salvation more precarious, the Humility polyptych negotiates female embodiment in arguably innovative ways that result in the patron's increased approximation to the normative ideal.

The selection of scenes from Humility's *vitae* portrays, on the one hand, an appropriate model of female piety wherein woman's position is aligned with care-taking, illness and death. On the other hand however, undoubtedly because of this marked piety, the polyptych also features Humility's 'Christ-like' miracles which result in an overall theme more reminiscent of Francis' life, than of some contemporary female saints. The effect is that Humility is placed within greater proximity to Christ, and therefore, to salvation; this becomes true in the ways her miracle scenes parallel Christ's life, but also because of the physical positioning of Humility's portrait in the centre of the piece, directly under a portrait of Christ. Humility's female body, therefore, is directly proximate to the normative ideal male body of Christ. The patron herself is also positioned more closely to salvation by her proximity to Humility. Despite her socially marginal, and sometimes invisible position as a woman in *trecento* Florence, in the polyptych, the patron's body is clearly portrayed in the central panel (see Fig. 12). It is important to note that her entire body is pictured (albeit covered thoroughly by a cloak), as it was more often the convention for women's votive portraits to only show her head and shoulders

(King 1998: 130). She is painted in the 'position of honour'—to the right of Humility, or on the viewer's left side—which was typically reserved for male patrons (*ibid.*, 136).²⁸ I believe that through the Humility altarpiece, the patron has made visible her desires to venerate a saint whom she conceived of as on par with male saints like Francis, and therefore, as situated closely to—rather than decidedly distanced from—Christ. Moreover, in having her own religious embodiment painted in full, centrally, and in the position of honour, the patron seems to be conveying her desires to approximate more closely soteriological ideals. Ultimately, the purpose of this altarpiece is not to disrupt dominant religious discourses, but instead, to take up a normative position within them. The Humility altarpiece demonstrates complex processes of discursive materialisation of gendered bodies, as well as highlighting how one female patron navigated those processes in order to pursue her desires. The altarpiece shows women's bodies as damaged by tying them to illness and death; it also, in more subtle ways, privileges and mimics male religious embodiment as the norm. The ways the piece stretches the boundaries of orthodoxy is by positioning a woman within close approximation to that norm, and by extension, making women's embodiment visible, central, and worthy of salvation. Whoever the patron of the Humility altarpiece was in particular, we can be sure that what she desired most was salvation. In creating an altarpiece as an act of charity, this woman's actions may be read as an expression of her agency not because of the ways the piece subverts dominant discourses of salvation, nor because of the ways it upholds these discourses. Rather, I assert that we may read the commissioning of the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility* as an act of female agency because of the various ways the iconography enables—through the negotiation of women's embodiment as damaged—the positioning of women in closer proximity to the normative ideals for religious embodiment, and thus, as more capable of salvation. The cost of this commission cannot, however, be forgotten. As has been discussed

²⁸ King writes, '[this] position was favoured because of the biblical statements that at the Last Judgement the blessed sheep would be placed on the right hand of God, that is, to the viewers' left as they faced God as Judge, and that the damned (who were identified as goats in the parables) would be on the right—an explanation given, for example, in the gospel of Saint Matthew (25.33)' (1998: 136-137). It is interesting to note that when votive portraits were of married couples, the woman was never placed in the position of honour and was consistently painted on the viewer's right. A more elaborate discussion of the placement of medieval men and women within physical spaces as well as in artistic representations is provided by Schleif 2005:207-249.

above, a commission this size was likely the result of a bequest by a wealthy widow who, in her death, wished to employ her dowry (funds in her control for the first time in her life) for charitable causes. The altarpiece then, both allowed the patron to make herself central, visible, and capable of salvation, but it also mandated her death in order for these things to be achieved.²⁹

Using the Humility altarpiece as a model, I want now to examine other pieces of ritual art to locate women's agency, even when the extant historical evidence is sparse. Similar to the reading I have provided here, I will suggest that by moving away from a binary interpretive structure of subversion versus collusion, we may begin to understand how *trecento* women's pursuits of their desires for salvation were in fact, acts of agency. In these pursuits, women were able to depict their temporal, corporeal proximity to idealised norms of (male) embodiment even in contexts where women's embodiments were defined as markedly abnormal. By continuing to take seriously women's discursive positioning within Florentine life as damaged, it also becomes possible to observe the (sometimes subtle) ways women's art commissions pushed back against normative definitions of gendered religious embodiment. Florentine women's expressions of agency through commissions of ritual art become all the more remarkable when one recalls that part of the 'cost' of accessing these opportunities of charity was frequently a woman's death. Women's agency then, must always be read as being simultaneously enabled and limited by soteriological discourses. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine two other examples of Florentine women's commissions of ritual art that, even in spite of sparse historical documentation, may still reveal something about the complexity of women's religious agency.

II. *The Pietà from San Remigio*

The altar screen featuring 'Giotto's' *Pietà* is, like the Humility altarpiece, without extant documentation clearly detailing authorship, dating or patronage (Fig. 3).³⁰

²⁹ King writes, '[it] is a crucial paradox that the very mechanisms of marginalization could offer the second sex alternative and unexpectedly powerful routes to privilege' (1995: 254).

³⁰ Birkmeyer states, '[unless] further documents should be discovered, the interpretation has to rest primarily on the painting itself and its position within the formal and iconological

Now in the Uffizi, the San Remigio *Pietà* has been analysed primarily for its expressiveness and affect. The screen measures an impressive 195 x 134 centimetres and features a striking gold-leaf background which frames thirteen figures, both holy and human, who mourn the dead body of Christ. Although Fossi (2009: 64) classifies the piece as a *Pietà*, scholars like Birkmeyer (1962: 464) and King (1998: 131) have suggested that it is more appropriately analysed as a Lamentation, or even as a scene depicting the Entombment of Christ. The piece's original purpose is also somewhat unclear as there is no mention of an altar in connection with the work—suggesting that it was not an altarpiece—and the presence of family crests on the predella, instead of roundels depicting holy figures, seems to point towards a more filial function. Even in spite of these ambiguities, the San Remigio altar screen may still be a useful work of ritual art with which to further explore women's expressions of agency. Prominently depicted on the left side of the screen are, as Fossi notes, 'two women dressed in 14th century clothing: a Benedictine nun, and a young, sumptuously dressed woman, kneeling to participate in the sorrowful event' (2009: 64). The placement, size, and posture of the two women depicted suggest, almost inarguably, that these are donor portraits. The lack of documentation hinted at thus far precludes the possibility that my analysis will provide any new concrete answers as to the identities, or even exact intentions of these two women patrons. Nevertheless, a careful investigation of the *Pietà's* iconography, coupled with historical contextual evidence may still yield an analysis which demonstrates the ways women expressed their agency through the pursuit of their desires for salvation, and in doing so, stretched the boundaries of orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy bodies.

The primary source for the San Remigio *Pietà* comes from Vasari's *Lives*³¹ which, although thoroughly problematised by many art historians, remains one of the most-referenced sources for *trecento* artists. Birkmeyer notes, that with regard to authorship:

Following Vasari a number of scholars gave the S. Remigio panel to the same artist who had painted the frescoes of the Bardi Chapel in Sta. Croce at Florence. Vasari had called this master Tommaso di Stefano detto Giotto,

development of the Trecento' (1962: 459). Similarly, King writes that the San Remigio panel is '[un]documented' (1998: 131).

³¹ The edition referenced in this thesis is Foster's translation, 1900.

fusing apparently two artists into one personality, namely his Giotto and a Maso di Banco.

(1962: 474)³²

Birkmeyer (1962: 474-475) turns towards the dating of the piece, and the timeline of Maso di Banco's work, to confirm that the San Remigio panel was not only painted by 'Giotto', but that it was painted sometime after 1350; a hypothesis confirmed by both Fossi (2009: 64) and King (1998: 131). In describing the San Remigio panel in particular, Vasari provides a vivid description of both the painting and the general demeanour of the artist:

Tommaso is said to have been of a melancholy temperament, and a lover of solitude; but profoundly devoted to art, and extremely studious. Some proof of this last assertion, we have in the church of San Romeo, in Florence, where there is a picture in distemper, by his master, which is executed with such earnest love and care, that no better work on panel is known to have proceeded from his hand. The picture is in the cross-aisle of the church, on the north side. It represents the Dead Christ, with the Maries and Nicodemus, accompanied by other figures. These all bewail the death of the departed, some bitterly weeping and wringing their hands, others more subdued in the expression of their grief; but all, both in countenance and attitude, evincing the most profound sorrow, as they look on the sacrifice that has been made for our sins.

(Foster 1900: 223)³³

Birkmeyer warns that the description of Tommaso himself was most likely the 'unfortunate personality compositum of Vasari's imagination' (1962: 459).

Nonetheless, Vasari's description of the painting has informed much art historical analysis of the piece and more concretely, helped to illuminate the panel's original location and possible function. As Birkmeyer notes, Vasari fails to mention an altar in connection with the image making it highly unlikely that the panel served as an altarpiece (and therefore that it did not serve a liturgical function) (1962: 477). Confirming this observation is Vasari's description of the panel's original location as being on a *tramezzo*, or partition. Birkmeyer quotes Arnaldo Cocchi who describes the painting as decorating the partition which separated the choir and sanctuary from the congregation of lay people.³⁴ Further, according to Foster's translation, the

³² Fossi similarly notes the mix up stating that Vasari 'confused [Giotto] with Maso di Banco' (2009: 64).

³³ During the fourteenth century, the church of San Remigio was called San Romeo (Gilday 2001: 53).

³⁴ Birkmeyer writes, 'Cocchi interprets Vasari right by saying the painting "decorava il tramezzo che separava il coro e il santuario dalla parte riserbata al popolo"' (1962: 477).

tramezzo upon which the San Remigio panel was located, was on the north side of the church. It seems as though the significance of the panel's placement and the function of partitions within *trecento* churches escaped Birkmeyer because he makes no commentary on the prevalence of these structures in Florence. I shall return to this point shortly, but Birkmeyer's analyses of Vasari's descriptions suggest strongly that the San Remigio *Pietà* was in fact an altar or rood screen, a description taken up by both King (1998: 131) and Fossi (2009: 64).

In order to interpret the 'function' of the screen, by which I believe he means the intentions of its patrons,³⁵ Birkmeyer examines the iconography and its theological significance. He clarifies that there is 'no scriptural basis for the *Pietà*' and that within 'Italian Trecento' painting, 'only a few examples of this type are known' (1962: 461-462). Conventionally, *Pietà* sculptures (and less frequently, paintings) isolate the Virgin Mary and Christ as they enact various scenes from the Passion. Although the San Remigio panel does not restrict itself to the Virgin and Christ, Birkmeyer argues that the intent is similar to other 'pure types' of *Pietà*s (*ibid.*). Specifically, he suggests that the 'aim is not the pictorial retelling of the moment between Descent from the Cross and Entombment, it is the crystallization of wailing over the Deceased by several participants into an image charged with emotion' (*ibid.*). Birkmeyer goes on to discuss the lack of any temporal or geographical markers; instead, the panel has a striking—albeit flat—gold background, making it more 'a stage rather than a locale' (*ibid.*, 464). In addition to the lack of 'narrative elements', further emphasis is placed on the motif of suffering in the panel through the presence of the *arma Christi*. 'Thanks to the absence of any further setting', Birkmeyer writes, '[the] Cross, its arms butting against vertical portions of the frame, is less the Cross of the Passion from which Christ was taken down, than, in the symbolical sense, one of the *arma Christi*' (*ibid.*). The importance of the *arma Christi* are further accentuated by the two

³⁵ I make this distinction because I believe the panel's function—as an altar screen—is fairly clear, and widely accepted amongst current art historians. The 'hypothesis' Birkmeyer builds throughout his piece is less about how the panel literally functioned and more about the ways he believed the patrons of the panel intended for it to be received.

male figures—identified as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea³⁶—standing to the right of the cross, ‘completely absorbed in showing and beholding the nails and the jar’ (*ibid.*, 465-466). The prevalence of the *arma* confirm that it is less likely that the panel was intended to offer a narrative rather than to convey a spiritual emphasis on the death of Christ, an emphasis further indicated by the repeated appearance of Mary Magdalene. Birkmeyer explains that from the ‘second quarter of the Trecento’, including ‘alike types’ within paintings was a fairly common tactic used to augment the number of minor, or ‘extra’ characters in religious paintings. The overall effect of this tactic, he argues, is the ‘amplification of content’ (*ibid.*, 469-470). With regards to Mary Magdalene specifically, Birkmeyer suggests that the content to be amplified is the motif of mourning:

In the major Passion scenes Mary Magdalene was given the role of the most ecstatic mourner. By repeating her type in the familiar positions and gestures...the very essence of the content is emphasized: the loss of the Savior and the extreme grief of the disciples. The intimate and quiet sorrow of the Mother in the Pietà proper becomes loud and public, so to speak. The augmentation of figures monumentalizes the emotion.

(*ibid.*, 470)

Ultimately, he asserts that the painting is not meant to convey a didactic narrative—as many pieces of religious art did—but rather, that the San Remigio panel was ‘a symbol of Christ’s death as part of man’s salvation’ (*ibid.*, 471).

Crucial to the panel’s focus on lamentation and mourning as integral to salvation is the presence of the two women donors. Following the Magdalene on the far left of the panel, the two donors participate in the mourning of Christ alongside the other saintly figures (Fig. 13). The presence of these donor portraits is, in some ways, unremarkable within the context of *trecento* ritual commissions. As Birkmeyer discusses, although donor portraits were still relatively rare in Florence at this time,

³⁶ Birkmeyer’s analysis of the identity of these two men is more elaborate than it is appropriate to relay here; see 1962: 465-467. Fossi also uses the same identifications for these figures, however she reverses them, saying, ‘[on] the right, as if cut out of gold, is the figure of Joseph of Arimathea, showing the distressed Nicodemus the urn of oil and the nails’ (2009: 64). Birkmeyer recognises that the two men had each been identified as both Nicodemus and Joseph; however he argues that ‘[the] majority of scholars...identify the left one as Nicodemus, surely because he is holding the nails. It is true, there is no consistent attribute for him, and he and Joseph of Arimathea can exchange roles. But it seems that in Italian Depositions of the Dugento and Trecento it was Nicodemus who pulled the nails off the Cross’ (1962: 465-466).

they were not entirely new. Moreover, the two San Remigio portraits follow convention insofar as they are smaller in scale than the depictions of the surrounding saints (Birkmeyer 1962: 471). However, in other ways, these donor portraits stretch the boundaries of convention in a few notable ways. Their placement in particular is evidence of innovation. Whereas current donor portraits more frequently placed the woman or man in a somewhat inconspicuous location, the San Remigio panel incorporates the two Florentine women in and amongst the saints. Further, although they are smaller than the surrounding saints, they are still only about twenty-five percent smaller (King 1998: 131).³⁷ Birkmeyer states:

...they have grown in size compared with earlier donors and, more important, their role has changed. Instead of being placed inconspicuously, they occupy the center of the left half of the painting. They are literally given space among the saints and are almost in touch with the feet of Christ—certainly a deliberate choice, since that is the place frequently accorded Mary Magdalene in Lamentations, in reference to her anointing Christ's feet (John 12:3-7).

(*ibid.*)

The result of these differences in the San Remigio panel is that the focus falls not only on the death of Christ, but also on the embodied devotion of the two female donors. Each woman's posture displays piety: in the posture of the Benedictine nun, we see her exhibiting the sanctity of prayer; in the posture of the young unveiled woman, we see her arms crossed in adoration (King 1998: 133). Both turn their gazes directly towards the dead Christ, and in turn, direct the viewer's gaze in the same direction. Their presence, and embodiments, are given divine sanctioning³⁸ by Saint Benedict (whose hand rests on the head of the nun) and Saint Remigius, titular saint of the church, whose hand rests on the head of the young woman. Birkmeyer argues that even though the women are not immediately involved in the Lamentation, 'the artist makes them prominent members of this painted *Lamentation* by allotting them almost the whole half of the composition' (1962: 467-468). He goes on to say that through the 'donors' devotion to the Savior, their faith in

³⁷ For a contemporary example wherein the donor is less conspicuous, and of a much smaller scale, see Figure 14.

³⁸ King writes, that within votive portraits, '[the] devotrix our devout man might also be shown as being introduced to the mercy of God by the imagery of the intercessor holding his or her shoulder or hand, and sometimes commissioners might in turn present their children to the attention of a patron saint' (1998: 136). I shall return to the presentation of children shortly.

His death [as] the prerequisite for salvation', the 'Remigio painting' becomes 'the first picture whose content is so largely defined by and so intensely centered on the private devotions of Christians' (1962: 471). Despite this summation, Birkmeyer concludes his analysis of the San Remigio *Pietà* by questioning the possibility that this painting was intended to act as a votive for the sake of the two women donors' salvation. First, he points to the presence of the coats of arms to suggest 'that a personal reason of family piety lies behind the commission' (1962: 477) and to the size of the panel:

Seen from a religious-psychological angle it is improbable that donor-devotees of this kind would monumentalize their devotion to such an extent that it is transformed into a public image. Also, Christian humility might have prevented such an attitude.

(*ibid.*)

As an alternative 'hypothesis', Birkmeyer suggests that perhaps the San Remigio panel 'was a funerary painting, not for the donors, but by them for a deceased relative, possibly their father' (*ibid.*). If indeed the panel was a funerary painting, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it was for a male member of a family because, as Birkmeyer points out, San Remigio was a canon's church and it would have been unlikely that women were allowed burial within it (480, n. 69). However, the original location of the panel (as an altar screen, on a partition), the iconography of the painting, and the donor portraits do not support Birkmeyer's thesis. Whereas he concludes that the panel was intended to commemorate a 'deceased father', and by extension, to act as a votive for his soul, I would suggest that in fact, the panel privileges a female audience, and performs in ways which suggest that the two women donors were expressing their desires for their own salvation.

Birkmeyer's conclusions seem to rest primarily on the fact that the San Remigio *Pietà* was large, lavish, and that it made women's private mourning quite public. These attributes, he argues, make it unlikely that a woman—who was concerned with 'Christian humility'—would have commissioned such a piece for her own salvation. Although large-scale, expensive commissions by women were certainly rarer in the fourteenth century than were similar commissions by men, they did exist nonetheless. King writes, for instance, that '[widows] did occasionally initiate attention-seeking representations, making votive images which included their own portraits as donatrices' (1998: 129). An example of another large-scale

commission by a Florentine woman, created roughly around the middle of the century, is *The Last Supper*, *The Tree of Life* and *Four Miracles* fresco in the former refectory of the Convent of Santa Croce (Fig. 15).³⁹ Given the sumptuous clothing of the young woman in the San Remigio panel, there is little doubt that the family to which she belonged was very wealthy and thus, a widow from this family who had control of her own dowry would certainly have had the means for a large commission (as well as the desire to rid herself of those means). King suggests that the large scale of the donor portraits almost certainly points to wealth and power:

The representation of the donatrix as three-quarters the scale of her intercessors compares with examples documented as representing the consorts of rulers: for instance, the donatrix portrait of Fina Buzzacarini, wife of Francesco da Carrara, made about 1375, in the Baptistery, Padua, and the representation of Queen Sancia of Naples with her husband King Robert, painted for the refectory of Santa Chiara in Naples about 1340. It may be that in the fourteenth century a larger-sized donatrix portrait could have signalled the highest possible social status.

(1998: 131)

Although Florence did not have royalty, or single rulers, there were nevertheless powerful families of wealth and, as I have suggested above, even the women of these families would have had impressive means at their disposal under certain circumstances. The size and richness of the panel is simply not enough to exclude the possibility of a woman donor, nor is the presence of coats of arms. As King notes, even when a woman was carrying out the wishes of a deceased male relative (most frequently a husband), it was not uncommon for her to alter the commission by including her own coat of arms (1998: 103).⁴⁰

It is also important to note that the appearance of the women donors in the panel, and the accompanying iconography support, rather than detract from, discursive constructions of woman as humble. Similar to the Humility altarpiece, the San Remigio panel both presents women's bodies in ways which were considered normative, as well as ways which pushed back at those normative boundaries. Both female donors have slightly downcast eyes, a quality which Casagrande demonstrates was a common point of interest amongst all male authors of *trecento*

³⁹ It is unclear whether Birkmeyer was aware of the Santa Croce frescoes. I will discuss this commission further in the following section of this chapter.

⁴⁰ For another detailed discussion of a *trecento* woman incorporating her own coat of arms into a commission for her deceased husband, see Giusecu Heller 2005: 161-184.

behavioural guides for women (1992: 95).⁴¹ The facial expressions the women wear are demure, whereas the male ecclesiastical figures in the painting gaze straight ahead, boldly. The dress of both women similarly conveys virtue, even if they are seemingly conflicting virtues. The nun wears a characteristic black top veil and her wimple covers not only her neck, but most of her face as well. Although it is difficult to see in the reproduction presented here (Fig. 13), there are also fine lines around the eyes and mouth of the kneeling nun. These characteristics were, King notes, common in portraits of women donors who were widows:

In Italian society, men remarried into old age, and signs of wear and tear on the face were no statement of intentions of sexual abstinence for a layman. However, the widow who had reached middle age would not be expected to remarry, and her modestly dressed and ageing figure could denote her conformity to the moderate life and the memory of her dead husband which the handbooks of conduct praised in widows.

(1998: 138)

The younger, more lavishly dressed woman portrayed in the San Remigio panel also conveys virtue, although of a distinctly different type. As discussed above, there can be little doubt that this young woman is part of a very wealthy, and undoubtedly, quite powerful Florentine family. Despite the fact that excess vanity and ornamentation were considered sinful, laywomen of upper-class status were also expected to act as 'beacons' of their family's power. Casagrande cites medieval writer Francesco of Barberino who 'recommended that when they went out, women, noble-women especially, should dress suitably for the power and wealth of the family they represented' (1992: 94). The donor portrait of the young woman, therefore, is not one of ostentation or a manifestation of a lack of humility, but it is rendered in such a way as to convey her status and lineage appropriately.⁴² Finally, it is important to note the donors' proximity to the dead body of Christ. Similar to the panels of the Humility altarpiece which confirmed the 'normativity' of women's embodiment as being closely linked to illness and death, the San Remigio panel

⁴¹ Casagrande writes of the instructions given in medieval behavioural guides, '[a] particular brand of moderation was called for to regulate corporeal expression...[woman] should not look straight ahead, wide-eyed, but look down, with eyelids half-closed' (1992: 95). She goes on to state that 'Antonio of Florence advised women to go from home to church as quickly and furtively as possible, "your eyes so low, that nothing but where you put your feet matters to you."' (*ibid.*).

⁴² For further resources concerned with the ways in which medieval women's attire was regulated according to their class, marital status, or occupation, see Owen Hughes 1992: 136-158; Warr 1999: 79-92 and 2010.

conforms to discursive norms of gender by placing the two women donors in the presence of the dead Christ. The appropriateness of this type of depiction within *trecento* Florence is further confirmed by the presence of the *arma Christi*. As Birkmeyer himself explains, the highly visible appearance of the nails, the jar, and the cross itself point towards the suffering of Christ, and by extension, the primary importance of the devotees' affect and mourning. I have demonstrated in previous chapters of this thesis how fourteenth-century Florentines believed that meditation on the death and suffering of Christ was particularly appropriate for women. Further, numerous contemporary scholars have shown the prominence of the symbols of Christ's Passion within medieval female visions and spiritual practices.⁴³ In light of these devotional tendencies, it is difficult to maintain that the appearance of the two women donors does not align with discursive norms of 'Christian humility'. That is not to suggest that the San Remigio panel entirely conforms to discursive definitions of women's religious embodiment, however. Indeed, the size and richness of the panel coupled with the prominence of the women's donor portraits seem almost to contradict normative definitions of women as passive, taciturn, modest, etc. Nonetheless, I argue that it is insufficient to assume that the panel was necessarily the commission of a Florentine man, purely because of the ways the panel stretches *trecento* definitions of orthodoxy. Instead, I propose that the San Remigio *Pietà* should be read as an expression of the women donors' desires for salvation—and therefore, as an expression of their agency—because in their reproduction and reiteration of religious discursive norms, the two women donors were able to construct their corporeality in ways that simultaneously conformed to, but also pushed against orthodox definitions of religious embodied identities.

(i) *An Alternative Reading*

In January of 1380, Mainardo Cavalcanti—a remarkably wealthy Florentine—left a will stipulating the construction of a chapel dedicated to the Annunciation in the southwest corner of Santa Maria Novella's transept. In addition to leaving funds and

⁴³ Because Birkmeyer was writing in 1962, it would be unreasonable to critique his ignorance of recent scholarship; my point here is simply to illuminate the ways concurrent analyses must move past dated assumptions about the 'public' and the 'private' in relation to who could participate in the production of ritual art (Lawrence 1997: 12).

instructions for the foundation of the chapel, votive masses and maintenance, Mainardo also named his wife, Monna Andrea, as executrix. According to Giurescu Heller, it was Monna Andrea who actively oversaw the construction and decoration of the family chapel:

It was she who undertook the actual building of the sacristy/chapel and later added her own bequests to that of her husband, commissioning the altarpiece and stained glass window and possibly frescoes. Her active role as patron of the family chapel is recorded by all contemporary documents pertaining to the decoration and functioning of the space.

(2005: 164)

Although Giurescu Heller recognises that Monna Andrea would have had ‘learned advisors’ supervising her patronage, she nevertheless explores the active ways in which the Florentine woman set out to express her own spiritual desires in conjunction with the execution of her husband’s will. On many of the surviving documents from the construction process of the chapel, Monna Andrea’s involvement is obvious, and from her own will, we can also see that she donated much of her own money to the project. However, Monna’s role as executrix was still perceived of as subordinate to her husband’s legacy as is evident even in the language of Monna’s will: Giurescu Heller states, ‘in her 1411 will she regards the chapel as belonging to Mainardo and his sons, and not her’ (2005: 167).⁴⁴ ‘This role of subordination’, Giurescu Heller continues, ‘was picked up by later sources, even more to the detriment of Monna Andrea’s contribution’ (*ibid.*). Despite Monna Andrea’s name being documented throughout the late fourteenth century, by the time she authored her own will, patronage began to be recorded in more ambiguous terms. In fact, Giurescu Heller shows that ‘*all* sources postdating Monna Andrea’s will and until the 1950s either totally ignore her contribution and mention only Mainardo, or noncommittally record the patronage of the “Cavalcanti family”’ (2005: 173). Giurescu Heller’s argument is that even if Monna Andrea was enmeshed in a historical context in which she was marginalised, and even if subsequent historical

⁴⁴ This observation is mitigated by the fact that Monna Andrea’s will would have been written by a notary in a way reflective of societal norms, regardless of Monna Andrea’s specific circumstances. According to Giurescu Heller, ‘[the] wording of the will illustrates the way in which society influenced women’s own perception of their place and role; however, our interpretation of it should be qualified, since it was written (and its content, as well as official language, surely influenced) by a male notary and possibly other male members of the family, who advised and “helped” her in matters of which she would have been (considered) ignorant’ (2005: 172).

accounts of the Cavalcanti family erased her patronage as a result of their own contextual biases, the ways Monna Andrea actively expressed her own spiritual desires cannot be ignored. In fact, the ways Monna Andrea's active patronage seem to contradict 'the records of regulation of access' in *trecento* Florence should, Giurescu Heller asserts, change our approaches to the studies of patronage rather than simply invalidate the visual evidence (like family crests or records of donations) Monna Andrea left behind. It is precisely this balance—'between the history created and written by men and the ways in which women crafted their own niche'—that I suggest must be applied to the San Remigio *Pietà* (*ibid.*, 177). Although I appreciate Birkmeyer's uncertainty about the patronage of the panel (owing to its size and visibility), it is, nonetheless, unsatisfactory to conclude that the panel's purpose was entirely unrelated to women's desires for salvation, particularly in light of the painting's historical context and its iconographical content. I propose that by reinvestigating the historical landscape within which the panel was commissioned, and by taking seriously the recognisable ways women were able to participate in the creation and veneration of art, it is possible to understand the San Remigio panel as an expression of *trecento* Florentine women's religious agency.

The most striking piece of evidence surrounding the San Remigio panel that I believe Birkmeyer fails to address adequately is the painting's original position within the church, and its associated function. As I mentioned above, Vasari describes the panel as being located on the north side of the church, on a *tramezzo* which has led many current scholars to assume that the panel is in fact an altar screen (a conclusion supported by the physical size of the panel). Two things bear mentioning here: one, altar screens or rood screens were erected in order to separate certain members of the congregation from the clergy and the high altar; two, within *trecento* churches, the north side of the church was almost always reserved for women. Giurescu Heller describes rood screens in the following way:

Functionally maintaining *clausura*, it symbolically separated the "upper church," restricted to the use of friars, from the "lower church" accessible to everybody. The traditional view holds that the laity was forbidden access beyond the rood screen, and its solid mass and locked gates obscured even the view of the main altar and flanking chapels.

(2005: 176)

Despite the fact that rood screens are no longer visible in most of Florence's churches and cathedrals—thanks in large part to sixteenth-century 'renovations'—

Marcia Hall confirms that the primary functions of *tramezzi* or rood screens was to 'impede the view of the high altar' and to 'separate the clergy and his ministers' (1974: 157-158). Giurescu Heller suggests that this type of segregation was not absolute, according to surviving documents from Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce, it appears that wealthy patrons could move past altar screens in order to access their family chapels in the transepts (2005: 176). That being said however, these documents 'hint' only at the 'presence of men beyond the rood screens', the privilege of moving beyond Giurescu Heller suggests, 'was not extended to their wives and daughters' (*ibid.*) (Fig. 16).⁴⁵ In the case of the San Remigio panel, we also need to take into account the fact that the *tramezzo* in question was on the north side of the church. As discussed by Corine Schleif, gendered associations of left and right (like the positions of donor portraits within paintings) were also mapped onto the spatial organisation of the church. Schleif states that in relation to the interior of the church, 'the meanings of left and right became mingled with those of north and south, dark and light. [...] From this vantage point, women were associated with the left or northern and darker portion of the church and men with the right or southern and lighter side of the building' (2005: 225).⁴⁶ It is plausible, therefore, to suggest that the panel's primary audience were women. Moreover, the importance of the panel to the worship experience is confirmed by Schleif who states that the '*tramezzo* or *ponte* in Italian formed the single most prominent visual focus for the laity when they gathered in the nave' (*ibid.*, 226). Thus, we may conclude that within its original context, the San Remigio panel acted as the 'most prominent visual focus' for the *trecento* lay women of the church. Although these assertions cannot be proven, they are nevertheless reasonable within the context of *trecento* religious life

⁴⁵ Giurescu Heller goes on to cast doubt on whether these regulations were always followed by upper-class women who surely would have required access to worship in their family's chapels. What is important for the current discussion however, is the intended purpose of an altar screen to segregate the laity, and particularly women. We can gain some visual confirmation of these regulations from Giotto's frescoes in the Basilica di Francesco, in Assisi.

⁴⁶ She clarifies that 'left and right were referenced from the standpoint of the faithful themselves, as they stood facing the choir'. Schleif, like Giurescu Heller, cautions that it is not always clear how frequently these prescribed 'practices of occupying space' were followed. However, some visual evidence, like Giotto's frescoes (mentioned above) or the painted ceilings of Orsanmichele (where female figures adorn the north side of the church and male figures adorn the south) still survive (2005: 225). For further discussion of physical segregation in churches, see Aston 1990: 237-294; Gilchrist 1994: 133-135.

and do seem to indicate that, contrary to Birkmeyer's argument that the panel was entirely about a man's salvation, the panel was rather more focused on women's devotions. The panel's function as an altar screen, and its positioning on the north side of the church certainly seem to point towards a female audience.

The iconography also appears to privilege the female gaze. King examines the difference between portraits of women *qua* women during this time, and portraits of women as donors:

Where portrayals of women often denoted the quality of the passive feminine as to-be-looked-atness, the portraits of the donatrix drew viewers to observe her watchfulness—in this case, to look at her looking intently at the holy figures she revered, and they guided the spectator to imitate her devotion. Female spectators were being offered an abnormally privileged viewing position here.

(1998: 137)

The San Remigio panel places the female gaze at its centre by focusing on the two female donors. The gaze of the spectator is also being 'directed' by the two women's gazes; in this way, the panel represents the intentions of the women donors by exhibiting clearly their subject for meditation.⁴⁷ It is not my intention here simply to invert Birkmeyer's hypothesis; the San Remigio panel may well have been the product of a bequest in a Florentine man's will. Nonetheless, what I have endeavoured to illuminate thus far are the ways in which this panel represents women's desires for salvation. If we take seriously the evidence I have examined and reconceptualise the San Remigio panel as being very much about women's expressions of devotion (even possibly in addition to those of men), how might we re-hypothesise the panel's patronage without further documentation? Again, I want to turn to the panel's immediate historical context in an attempt to develop a theory of patronage such that women's expressions of agency might become visible.

The example of Monna Andrea, briefly discussed above, is perhaps one of the most well-documented and therefore most-researched cases of a *trecento* Florentine

⁴⁷ King explains that the technique exhibited in the San Remigio panel—to direct the audience's gaze by including a portrait of someone who acts as a 'guide'—was not uncommon. By the early fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti even included this technique in his didactic treatise, *On Painting*. King writes, '[he] advised the artist to include the figure of "someone who points to some remarkable thing in the picture", and stated that in any picture a well-executed portrait will steal the scene—"the face that is known draws the eyes of all spectators". Alberti assumed that the guide and the portrait which drew the eye would both be masculine' (1998: 138). As we can see however, in the San Remigio panel, these techniques were adapted for women.

woman performing as the acting patron for a commission that was originally her husband's. In Giurescu Heller's exploration of *trecento* Florentine patronage, she examines not only Monna Andrea's case, but also those of other Florentine women who acted as executors of their husband's commissions and in so doing, left their own unique imprints on the products of their (joint) patronage. In fact, in describing female patrons of fourteenth-century Florence, Giurescu Heller states that there were two categories:⁴⁸ the first 'consists of women who contributed to the chapels founded by their families...[some] in order to fulfill the last wishes of their deceased husbands' (2005: 169). The second category, one made up of far fewer women, was composed of those women 'who took the initiative and built or acquired a chapel for themselves and their descendants' (*ibid.*). Regarding the San Remigio panel, therefore, it is possible to conceive of it in terms of the two women's involvement as 'acting' patrons of a deceased male relative's will, or as a commission made by one of the women herself. In the case of the two women donors acting on behalf of a deceased male relative, two observations (which have been mentioned briefly above) complicate this hypothesis: on the one hand, there is no portrait of the deceased man himself and because of a lack of information surrounding the coats of arms on the predella of the panel,⁴⁹ we cannot assume that it necessarily belongs to the hypothetical man in question. Second, there is also no inscription on the predella, nor do any of the saints appear to act as representations of a namesake; in other words, all of the saints present are either directly relevant to the *Pietà* or they are representations of the relevant ecclesiastical authorities.⁵⁰ Combined with the likelihood that the primary audience of the panel was female, and that the panel's central focus is on the two women's gaze, it is difficult to locate the male patron visually. This absence would plausibly, therefore, seem to negate the purpose of a man commissioning a votive piece, that is, intended to solicit recognition of his donation and remembrance for his soul. The dominance of the portrayals of the two women's religious embodiments cannot be framed in terms of 'traces' or 'impressions': they are the focus of the panel and if there was in fact a man behind

⁴⁸ Giurescu Heller is discussing patronage of architecture specifically, but I do not think it is inappropriate to extend this classification to other types of patronage.

⁴⁹ See Birkmeyer 1962: 480, n. 68.

⁵⁰ For the importance of patron saints and namesakes in fourteenth-century Florence, see Klapisch-Zuber 1985: 283-309. For an example of an art historical study that links the presence of saints to patron names, see Gordon 2011: 52-91.

the commission, his own expressions of devotion are not discernible from those of the two women pictured. As a result, I believe that it is more constructive to analyse the panel in terms of women's desires for salvation and although I, like Birkmeyer, can only speculate about a potential woman donor, I believe an alternative theory of patronage strengthens my argument and addresses some of the anomalies in Birkmeyer's.

Florentine women were not only restricted from making their own financial decisions until they were widowed (and of course, even then it was a matter of some debate), but they were also frequently prohibited from pursuing their desired spiritual paths. For many upper-class Florentine women, entering a nunnery was rarely an option until after they were widowed and they were no longer of a 'marriageable' age. Numerous Tuscan hagiographies suggest that on the one hand, young upper-class women were kept in the 'marriage market' for as long as possible and, on the other hand, that it was not until they were widows—and therefore chaste—that they were perceived of as being truly capable of sanctity, and by extension allowed to pursue a spiritual life (Benvenuti-Papi 1996: 84-103). For the wealthy families of Florence, committing a daughter to a convent at an early age meant a lost economic opportunity. The San Remigio panel may be a visual record of such a family. The Benedictine nun, whose conservative dress and signs of age may suggest her status as a widow, may have taken vows only after a life of marriage and motherhood. Although religious communities forbade ownership of property, it was not unheard of for wealthy nuns who acquired access to their dowries, or who were the recipients of inheritance to be allowed to commission on an individual basis (King 1992: 375). It is possible that the nun, who became fully professed only after her husband's death and who had access to her dowry, commissioned the panel as a bequest in her will. The presence of the younger unveiled woman would then support the nun's role as widow patron. As discussed previously, it was not uncommon for donor portraits to depict not only themselves, but also their children who are painted as if they are being presented to protective saints. The young woman in the San Remigio panel is slightly smaller in stature, possibly pointing to her youth, and she is under the protection of the church's patron saint, Remigius. She

does not wear a veil which may suggest that she is unmarried (Warr 1994: 169),⁵¹ but she is no doubt intended for marriage judging by her elaborate dress; again, the probability that she is dressed to ‘advertise’ the prominence of the family is high and thus, her value on the marriage market would be too great to commit her to a convent.⁵² The San Remigio panel would, under these circumstances, most likely be a bequest for the sake of the nun’s salvation as well as for the sake of her daughter’s. By commissioning such a grand piece, the nun would have been able to rid herself of sinful excess wealth. In requesting her own portrait, as well as that of her daughter’s, she was expressing her devotion to the suffering of Christ, soliciting prayers for her soul, and seeking spiritual protection and prayers for her daughter who, because of her status, was bound to married life and the perpetuation of the family’s wealth. Additionally, despite women’s marginalisation and subordination within *trecento* society—even within the church where they were relegated to the darker side of the building, behind a screen that prohibited them from seeing or being seen—the San Remigio panel successfully pushes against the discursive boundaries around the construction of women’s embodiment. This commission brings women’s bodies to the centre of the painting; they are visible, recognisable and, as Birkmeyer notes, their appearance on an altar screen makes their devotions entirely public. The two women donors are in the position of honour, they enjoy the approval of the church, and they are in close proximity to Christ. Owing to this proximity, the panel makes a clear claim for the spiritual embodiments of these two women within a recognisable soteriological discourse. Moreover, the proximity of the two women’s bodies to the idealised normative male body of Christ increases their possibilities for salvation. The depiction of the two women does not contradict ‘feminine virtues’ however, it is only through their performance of modesty, chastity, and filial devotion that any woman—even one of marked wealth—would have been able to access the process of commissioning in the first place. Discussing other concurrent cases of female

⁵¹ King notes that ‘[in] some instances the donatrix was portrayed with youthful looks, either without a veil or wearing a transparent one revealing an elaborate *coiffure*, and with a dress displaying her neck. But such examples are in a minority’ (1998: 137).

⁵² Klapisch-Zuber writes that, “‘Honorable’ marriages were what regulated the entries and exists of the wives, and the normal state, the state that guaranteed the honor of the women and the “houses,” could be no other than the married state’ (1985: 119). Reflecting on the data drawn from *catasto* of 1427, she goes on to state that ‘[among] Florentine women who belonged to the age group of 20-24 years of age, 92 percent were married; the proportion is even higher among the wealthier classes’ (*ibid.*, n. 11).

patronage in *trecento* Tuscany, King asserts her hypothesis behind a Sienese fresco and its patron:

Here then, arguably, is a widow who had herself represented as conformingly feminine in her devoutness, but who publicly claimed personal prominence in the size of her portrayal, her presence with the saintly mourners, and the powerful spiritual protectors she clustered around her. Such public prominence and the gift to the congregation of so rich a devotional image push firmly at the masculine definitions of what women should do.

(1995: 246)

In a similar way to the widow patron from Siena, I argue that the women donors pictured in the San Remigio panel conformed to normative definitions of 'woman' in ways which allowed them to exercise agency by expressing their personal desires for salvation. The results convey both the ways women's spiritual embodiment was marginalised, erased and constricted, as well as the way women's own expressions of agency through their pursuit of salvation pushed back at definitions of orthodoxy. Regardless of the patron's identity, the San Remigio *Pietà* emphasises the spiritual desires of the two women depicted, and in its functioning as a 'visual focus' for the female congregation, it enabled numerous Florentine women to emulate the two women in their pursuit to approximate ideal embodiment.

III. *The Santa Croce Refectory Frescoes*

The last case study of women's commissions of ritual art in *trecento* Florence is the fresco by Taddeo Gaddi in the former refectory of Santa Croce. Similar to the two case studies above, the Santa Croce frescoes are undocumented (Borsook 1980: 42). However, the appearance of a donor portrait in the central fresco, *The Tree of Life*, suggests that the frescoes were commissioned by a Franciscan tertiary sometime in the middle of the fourteenth century. Although much of the art historical scholarship that has addressed the Santa Croce frescoes agrees that the kneeling woman depicted is most likely the donor, there are varying theories as to the woman's identity. The content of the frescoes have been widely accepted as an 'appropriate' program for a refectory; that is, the frescoes seem to centre thematically on food and meditation. One result of this widely-held assumption (that the program of the frescoes was chosen only for its relation to the refectory's function) has been, I suggest, a neglect of the possible ways the woman donor sought to express her

spiritual desires by means of this thematic commission. Through examining important spiritual themes to *trecento* Florentine women, as well as the iconography of the frescoes, I want to argue that an alternative reading is possible, one that potentially expands what we can know about the female donor, and adds complexity to established readings of the program of the frescoes. It is not to suggest that these frescoes are more expressive of the patron's desires than they are of the traditional themes expected in a refectory; rather, it is insufficient to assume that the food-centred program of the Santa Croce refectory is only reflective of the function of the space. In other words, I assert that by analysing the Santa Croce refectory frescoes within the context of *trecento* Florentine women's experiences, in addition to the broader context of art historical trends of the time, it becomes possible to trace the ways these frescoes were expressive of the patron's individual spiritual desires, as well as how they performed more traditionally as meditation guides.

The Santa Croce refectory frescoes make up a mural which decorates an entire wall in what is now the Museo del Opera (Ladis 1982: 171) (Fig. 17). According to Ladis, in addition to the central fresco depicting Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* or, *Tree of Life* (in which the donor is pictured), the mural also includes:

[The] *Stigmatization of Saint Francis* (top left), *Saint Louis Feeding the Poor and Sick at Santa Croce in Florence* (center left), the *Priest at his Easter Meal Receiving Word of Saint Benedict's Hunger in the Wilderness* (top right), and the *Magdalen Washing the Feet of Christ at the House of Simon Pharisee* (center right).

(Ladis 1982: 173)

Vasari first attributed these frescoes to Giotto (Foster 1900: 97), however by the early nineteenth century, scholars began to doubt Vasari's assessment and by the end of the 1800s Taddeo Gaddi was identified as the principal artist (Ladis 1982: 172). The dating of the mural is still relatively contested: Paoletti and Radke suggest somewhat ambiguously that the mural was commissioned 'probably in the 1330s' (2005: 93); Cole suggests that the frescoes were painted at 'about 1360' (1987: 143); and Borsook notes that '[the] refectory mural is usually dated soon after [Taddeo's] *Marian* cycle in the nearby Baroncelli chapel painted during the 1330s' (1980: 42; see also Ladis 1982: 172)). Ladis suggests a date in the middle of this range; building on the work of scholars Crow and Cavalcaselle, he argues that the 'grim and somber mood, the wiry, vinelike drawing, and the surprising colors represent a more

evolved stage of Taddeo's work after the Uffizi *Madonna* of 1355' (1982: 172). The importance of this debate is tied to the identity of the woman patron depicted in the central panel. Many scholars, including King (1995: 262-264) and Paoletti and Radke (2005: 93), have agreed that the Franciscan tertiary is most likely Monna Vaggia Manfredi. The coats of arms which appear four times on the vertical borders between the *Tree of Life* and the surrounding scenes have been identified as belonging to the Manfredi family (Fig. 18).⁵³ However, Ladis argues that Monna Vaggia's death, dated as 10 November 1345, makes the execution of the fresco (which he dates as after 1355) too late for her to have been the patron (1982: 173).⁵⁴ I shall return to this point shortly, but in the interim, it is enough to note that scholars agree that the woman kneeling in the central panel of the refectory frescoes is almost certainly the patron. The iconography supports this hypothesis: the appearance of Saints Clare and Elizabeth of Hungary (in the bottom corners of the *Tree of Life* panel), affirm the influence of the donor who appears as a Franciscan tertiary. As King notes, '[while] Clare was the founder of the second-order Franciscans, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary was the patron of the Franciscan tertiary women, and she is painted in clothing resembling that of the donatrix' (1995: 263).⁵⁵ Furthermore, the size of the kneeling tertiary also confirms her status as a donor; both Borsook (1980: 42) and King (1995: 263) note the smaller size of the portrait in relation to the surrounding holy figures.

The other figures in the central fresco are either traditional attendants in scenes of the Passion—like Christ's mourners—or they are of significance to the Franciscans. Specifically, the Maries and John the Evangelist appear on the left, Francis and Bonaventure (whose treatise informs Taddeo's depiction of the *Tree of*

⁵³ By 1980, Borsook had not yet made this identification and instead she suggested three other possible contemporary families; see p. 43, n. 3. For confirmation of the coats of arms as belonging to the Manfredi see Ladis 1982: 172; Paoletti and Radke 2005: 93; and King 1995: 264.

⁵⁴ King misreads Ladis here: she writes that he 'suggested that [the appearance of Manfredi coats of arms] might indicate a commission by Madonna Vaggia Manfredi, who died at the convent in 1345' (1995: 264). King's citation for this assertion (278, n. 54), comes from Becherucci who refers to Ladis 1982. Of course, in Ladis' catalogue itself, he in fact says the opposite to King. He does not rule out the possibility of a female donor, but nor does he affirm the presence of one.

⁵⁵ Borsook also acknowledges the appearance of the two female saints as confirmation of the donor's status as a tertiary; however, she questions the identity of Elizabeth because 'she lacks the usual crown as one of her identifying attributes' (1980: 42-43, n. 2).

Life) appear below the cross, and to the right are Saints Anthony of Padua, Dominic⁵⁶ and Louis of Toulouse. Borsook observes that Louis appears twice throughout the mural, once to the right of the cross and once in a scene where he is depicted attending to the 'poor and the sick' (1980: 42). She notes that in 1333, the Franciscans became 'official custodians of the church' in Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion (where the Last Supper was believed to have taken place), 'through the interest of King Robert of Anjou' (*ibid.*).⁵⁷ 'Taddeo's mural', she suggests, 'may have been painted under the stimulus of this event and it was probably no accident that King Robert's recently canonized brother, Louis of Toulouse, appears in the mural twice' (*ibid.*). The four scenes surrounding the central fresco are, Borsook argues, 'distributed according to their subject and setting':

Two Franciscan events occur on our left (but the liturgical right): *Francis's Stigmatization* and *St. Louis of Toulouse serving a Meal to the Poor*. [...] Above, on the right, is another scene of monastic retreat: *St. Benedict in his Wilderness Grotto is rescued from Starvation on Easter Day* by an angel who summons a pious diner from his meal. Below, *Mary Magdalen washes and anoints Christ's Feet in the House of the Pharisee*.

(1980: 42)⁵⁸

Borsook describes these four scenes as being natural choices for the refectory mural because of their association with food and with meditation. Moreover, they are indicative of events which were meaningful to the Order more generally.⁵⁹ She

⁵⁶ Amanda Quantz suggests that Dominic's presence indicates the Franciscan understanding that their mission was one shared by the Dominicans, as well as being symbolic of the friendship shared between Francis and Dominic. St. Anthony of Padua, a famous Franciscan preacher, represents the need for strong preachers 'who are ready to take up the cause of the Gospel' (2007: 344).

⁵⁷ King Robert, Borsook explains, was not only King of Naples and Sicily, but of Jerusalem as well. Robert's concession of the site as a Franciscan residence was sanctioned by Clement VI's papal Bull in 1342 (1980: 43, n. 5).

⁵⁸ Borsook points to the repeated appearance of Mary Magdalene in the mural: '[like] Francis and Louis of Toulouse, she appears twice in the scheme. Also like them, she was the object of a cult promoted in Italy by the Angevins and the Franciscans who saw her as an example of humility and as a redeemed sinner' (1980: 42). I will elaborate on this point in the following section of the case study.

⁵⁹ Cole echoes these arguments. Of the four surrounding scenes, he writes that they 'all have been chosen because they include a table and food...[T]he function of the room has dictated the choice of the subject' (*ibid.*, 144). The bottom panel depicting the *Last Supper* is also analysed by all of the scholars above as being appropriate to the function of the space; see Borsook 1980: 42; Cole 1987: 144-145. Only Cole's analysis of the *Last Supper* panel elaborates on its meaning (p. 145). The majority of the commentary on this panel relates to its 'spatial relationship' with the rest of the mural; see Cole 1987: 144-145; Borsook 1980: 42; Ladis 1982: 172.

draws similar conclusions about the central *Tree of Life* fresco. Where previous depictions of Bonaventure's vision had illustrated scenes of Christ's life, Taddeo's rendition relies on lengthy Latin inscriptions.⁶⁰ She argues that this adaptation is fitting 'for a more literate public: the convent of Santa Croce which included its renowned *Studio*' (1980: 42). The *Tree of Life* fresco, therefore, is relevant because of the convent's renowned scholasticism.⁶¹ Cole similarly frames the central fresco in terms of its appropriateness, but further draws out its theological significance:

The fresco does not represent the historical Crucifixion, the actual moment of Christ on the cross, but rather an image meant for contemplation and meditation, appropriate for a refectory. Beyond this aspect of the fresco, the Crucifixion is also appropriate because it represents the Holy Cross, the Santa Croce of the Franciscan church whose refectory it decorates. Moreover, Christ's sacrifice and the presentation of his body in the center of the wall were central to the Eucharistic ritual around which the church itself was built.

(1987: 143)

Quantz also conceptualises the purpose and performance of Taddeo's *Tree of Life* in terms of its relevance to the viewers, the Franciscan friars: '[its] historical characters remind the friars of their Franciscan origin and their mission to the people of God in the bustling metropolis. The themes depicted are designed to draw the friars into Christ-centered prayer' (2007: 333).⁶² These readings of the Santa Croce frescoes are not inaccurate and in fact, they provide valuable interpretations of *trecento* Franciscan spirituality; nonetheless, they are also incomplete. In all of the scholarship examined thus far, King's is the only article to include any theorisation of how the various scenes in the refectory mural might be an 'appropriate' choice for the female donor, as well as for the Franciscans and the space.⁶³ This elision raises

⁶⁰ See Ladis 1982: 171-172 for the inscriptions on the branches, as well as those on the 'fruit'.

⁶¹ For further discussion of the development of the scholastic environment at Santa Croce see Roest 2000: 1-114.

⁶² Quantz gives a much more elaborate analysis of the theological significance of the varying scenes in the mural to the Franciscans at Santa Croce than either Borsook or Cole; see 2007: 342-354. Hatfield also gives a more in-depth account of the theological meanings behind Taddeo's mural, albeit relatively brief (1990: 132-160).

⁶³ Her treatment of the frescoes is limited and unfortunately, contains at least two errors; one already noted. King speculates that the painted donor 'may represent the woman who gave the mural to her fellow tertiaries' (1995: 264). One can only assume that she has misinterpreted the use of the word 'convent' here: in contexts relating to *trecento* Florence, the word convent does not necessarily denote a house of women religious but may indicate either houses of women or men. The convent at Santa Croce was, at the time of the fresco's

new research questions. If we were to take the patron's own experiences into account (in addition to what we know about refectory decoration and Franciscan spirituality), how might a reading of the mural change? What kinds of expressions are being depicted other than those that pertain to the space itself? How might this mural be read from the perspective of the woman donor, rather than from that of the Franciscan recipient? In the final section of this case study, I suggest an alternative reading of the Santa Croce refectory frescoes that considers these questions and that explores possible ways the iconography might be demonstrative of the patron's desires for salvation.

(i) *An Alternative Reading*

In order to discuss the potential ways the patron may have sought to demonstrate her own devotion through the commissioning of the Santa Croce refectory frescoes, it is necessary to revisit the issue of her identity. Although it is not possible to prove conclusively that the woman pictured was in fact Monna Vaggia Manfredi, I believe by examining some additional surrounding evidence it is plausible to affirm her as the most likely candidate. As Ladis explains, the Manfredi family—whose coats of arms appear in the refectory frescoes—were primarily buried in Santa Maria Novella. This was true for all but one branch of the family whose burial in Santa Croce is marked by a stone (now in the wall above the north door entering the nave) which Ladis records as saying, 'HEREDUM DOMINI PHILIPPI MANFREDI ET DESCENDENTIUM' (1982: 172-173). Filippo Manfredi's death is unrecorded, although, as stated previously, his wife MonnaVaggia's death is recorded in November 1345. Ladis has argued that the date of her death is too early to make her the patron of the refectory frescoes. However, two things bear mentioning: first, the dating of the frescoes is far from concrete and scholars like Borsook date them prior to Monna Vaggia's death. Second, even if Ladis' dating is accurate, that alone does

completion, a friary. Moreover, non-confessed women religious—like tertiaries or *pinzochere*—would not necessarily have been cloistered by the mid-fourteenth century (Strocchia 2009: 1-27). Thus, it would not have been possible for a tertiary to donate a mural to her sisters as they would not have been housed in Santa Croce at this time. Nevertheless, King does provide at least a brief hypothesis of how the patron's own spirituality might have been relevant: '[the] theme of spiritual and temporal food which is the import of the mural would be considered an appropriate one for a woman to present' (1995: 264).

not preclude Monna Vaggia from being the donor. In her discussion of thirteenth-century construction of Santa Croce, Nancy Thompson demonstrates the disparity between early bequests and their actual use. For instance, she notes that ‘the first record of a bequest for a chapel in the new Santa Croce actually pre-dates the construction by three years’ (1999: 2). Further, there is record of a bequest by Donato Peruzzi in 1292 for the construction of a family chapel, ‘contingent upon the completion of the rebuilding of the church within ten years of Peruzzi’s death’ (*ibid.*). Clearly it was not uncommon for Florentine members of Santa Croce in the late thirteenth- and early-fourteenth centuries to leave bequests with the full knowledge that the execution of their requests would not be immediate. Also of note is the fact that construction of Santa Croce was on-going throughout the fourteenth century. After the completion of the transept and apse around 1310, construction slowed and the cathedral was not consecrated until 1422 (*ibid.*). Lags between bequests and productions may, therefore, have been quite regular throughout the *trecento*. If a similar scenario unfolded in the case of the refectory frescoes, it would still be entirely possible that Monna Vaggia was indeed the patron. The lack of information surrounding Filippo’s death also allows for some leeway in assuming Monna Vaggia’s patronage. The size of the refectory frescoes suggest a substantial donation; for Monna Vaggia to have access to that kind of wealth, it is likely that Filippo would have had to predecease his wife, leaving her with her dowry and potentially some additional inheritance. The appearance of the donor again confirms her status as a widow: she is very conservatively dressed with a wimple that covers her forehead and most of her face, and she has lines around her eyes and mouth, indicating her age (Fig. 19). Whether we can conclusively identify Monna Vaggia as the donor is debatable, we are almost certainly dealing with a wealthy widow of the Manfredi family who left a bequest sometime in the early-middle to middle of the fourteenth century.

Further discussion of the identity of the patron—even if this is more in terms of what kind of woman she was, rather than her actual name—is an important step in deciphering the potential ways the iconography of the refectory frescoes also speak to the woman’s spiritual desires. The most obvious point of overlap, between the relevance of the iconography to the space and its relevance to the woman herself, is the food-centred program. Bynum has demonstrated the myriad ways

food was both literally and metaphorically meaningful to medieval women's spirituality. Moreover, Florentine women's roles as preparers of food meant that often, their most available means of exercising charity was through food distribution. The presence of Elizabeth of Hungary in the frescoes points toward a miracle which would have spoken to Florentine women's lived experiences. As King explains:

Elizabeth holds her robe full of roses to allude to the miracle which had occurred when her furious husband had discovered her disobeying his order that she should not go out into the streets and give bread to the poor. When he commanded her to open her cloak to show him the food she was carrying, he was confounded because the bread turned to roses.

(1995: 263-264)

The patron, like Elizabeth, would most likely have felt great spiritual unease with her status and her wealth. Florentine women were characterised as being both naturally suited to practising food-related charity, and because of their corporeality, as being in need of spiritual guidance so as not to impoverish the *casa* through zealotry. For the female donor of the refectory frescoes, Elizabeth of Hungary may have represented a mode of spirituality that confirmed the donor's own lived experiences and yet, because of her beatification, Elizabeth also provided an ecclesiastically-sanctioned model of pious expression. The other food-related scenes surrounding the *Tree of Life* fresco may be read in similar ways. The scene of Louis attending to the 'poor and sick' would have been particularly relevant to a *trecento* woman. As discussed previously, not only were women the primary carers for the ill (and, as we have seen, their embodiments were directly linked with illness), but, in the case of the 'honourable poor', it was considered a woman's job to collect alms, making many women the visible manifestations of a family's poverty (Fig. 20). These scenes then, can be read as portraying both normative representations of 'woman' (as food-preparer, carer, as 'poor and sick'), as well as the patron's desires to express charity, specifically through food. Ultimately, her commission of frescoes for a refectory may not have been solely because of the function of the space, but also because she was already accustomed to expressing her embodied desires for salvation through food-related charity. This is not to doubt the spiritual gravity the food-related program had with the Franciscans themselves, nor is it to suggest that the woman patron's spiritual desires were the only thing directing the iconography of the mural. Indeed, as Giurescu Heller has argued, decisions in 'iconographic

matters...were at least supervised, and most often wholly controlled' by the mendicants themselves (2005: 164).⁶⁴ Nonetheless, I would argue that the donor's own expressions of devotion are traceable and that the ways the woman painted in the refectory frescoes sought to demonstrate her desires for salvation are intertwined with the significance of the iconographic program as it relates to the space.

Another element of the frescoes which seems to confirm the mural's relevance for both the Franciscans as an Order, and for the woman patron herself, is the emphasis on devotion to Francis. Whilst Clare and Elizabeth are portrayed in the mural, their roles are relatively minor. The patron's primary devotion is not to the founder of the second-order, or even to the patron saint of the tertiaries (of whom the patron clearly considers herself a part). Instead, the donor is depicted kneeling behind, and looking intently towards Francis. In the *Tree of Life* fresco, Francis embraces the cross upon which Christ is crucified, symbolising his recognition of Christ's sacrifice and his own desires to imitate the bodily suffering of Christ (Hatfield 1990: 142). The patron's proximity to Francis—she is literally within inches of him—and the intensity of her gaze indicate her admiration of him, as well as her wish to corporeally approximate his spirituality. Her positioning with the mourners of Christ would, I argue, further confirm her attempts to express her devotion to Francis whose own devotion was emphatically focused on Christ's Passion and suffering. She is compositionally grouped with the Maries and John, implying that she should be associated with the affected behaviour being displayed by the holy mourners, again, behaviour Francis himself tried to emulate. This grouping is particularly appropriate for a fresco informed by Bonaventure's works, wherein he encouraged bodily, affected meditation and which was considered a fitting resource for women who were already conceived of as being more emotional, more bodily.

The appearance of Francis' stigmatization might also be read in terms of the patron's devotion to Francis. Although the stigmata miracle was, as Cole suggests, 'the most important event in the life of the patron saint of the Franciscans' (1987:

⁶⁴ I would argue that there is some visual evidence to support this claim with regards to the refectory frescoes, specifically. The use of Latin scrolls, instead of pictorial representations of Christ's life, or the scene depicting St. Benedict in the 'wilderness', seem to point more towards ecclesiastical authority than towards individual expressions of piety.

144), and therefore to be expected in their ritual art, it was also meaningful to *trecento* women. Bynum explains that Francis ‘and the modern figure Padre Pio are the only males in history who have claimed all five visible wounds’ (1989: 165).⁶⁵ She goes on to state that there were ‘dozens of claims for late medieval women. Francis may indeed have been the first case...but stigmata rapidly became a female miracle’ (*ibid.*). It is not possible to know whether the woman painted in the refectory frescoes experienced stigmata herself, but in the context of what we know about medieval women’s spirituality more generally, it is feasible to suggest that Francis’ stigmatization would have been spiritually important to her (although potentially for different reasons), just as it was for the Franciscans. As a result of the ways women’s corporeality materialised as defective, corrupt and as an enemy to be defeated, through the reiteration of theological and social discourses, it may be that precisely what appealed to the female donor was the ways Francis’ own mortified flesh acted as a beacon of his piety. In other words, the woman donor may have found Francis’ and Christ’s stigmata spiritually meaningful not simply because of the ways her own female flesh bled, but also perhaps because of the ways her embodiment was already defined as damaged and in these two male models, she could reconceive of that damage as sanctified.

Here we should recall Borsook’s observation that Francis appears twice in the mural (1980: 42). Building on Birkmeyer’s assessment of the San Remigio *Pietà* in the previous section of this chapter, we might understand the repetition of certain figures as a means of amplifying content. The repeated appearance of Francis is, on a very basic level, undoubtedly due to his role as founder of the Order. However, following Birkmeyer’s line of interpretation, I would suggest that the doubling of his portrait was also intended to intensify the importance of his example—specifically, *imitatio Christi*—to the Franciscans, as well as to the female donor. The model of *imitatio Christi* was embodied in Francis and was thoroughly promoted to *trecento* Florentines as a means to pursue salvation. The woman portrayed in these frescoes demonstrates, through her devotion to Francis, her personal attempts to corporeally approximate his spiritual model, and consequently to approximate the embodiment

⁶⁵ Contradictory to Bynum’s claim, Gordon records the example of Fra Philip Alquier whose ‘meditations on the Passion of Christ were so intense that he himself bled from his hands, feet and side’ (2011: 377).

of Christ. Thus, what is visible are not just indicators of the space the frescoes occupied, but also the patron's desires to perform in a mode of spiritual embodiment worthy of salvation.

The repetition of figures also serves as the basis for my final argument for analysing the Santa Croce refectory frescoes not only in terms of Franciscan spirituality, but also in terms of the patron's expressions of her desires for salvation. In addition to Francis, two other figures appear twice: Louis of Toulouse and Mary Magdalene. As discussed previously, the appearance of Louis is not only a recognition of his saintly example, but (because of his lineage), it may also have been an acknowledgement of the recent declaration of Mt. Zion (the site of the Last Supper) as a Franciscan seat by King Robert of Naples (d. 1343).⁶⁶ Borsook also ties the repeated appearance of the Magdalene to the Angevins who, alongside the Franciscans, promoted her example of humility and 'as a redeemed sinner' in Italy. I agree with Borsook's assertions here, but I would also argue that there may be an additional link to the Angevins that is not addressed in her hypothesis. King Robert of Anjou was well known to be devoted to the Franciscan Order; however it was his wife, Queen Sancia of Majorca whose Franciscan devotion became most notable.⁶⁷ As is evidenced by several surviving personal letters, Sancia was so devoted to the Franciscans, and so desirous of living a religious life, that in 1317, she even went so far as to request a divorce from her husband, King Robert, in order to enter a convent of Poor Clares (Warr 1994: 327). Denied this option because of her royal obligations, Sancia instead spent her time and money on the construction of numerous Franciscan sites including the expansion of Santa Maria Maddalena,⁶⁸ and building the church of Santa Chiara (*ibid.*, 327-328).⁶⁹ Sancia's personal devotions were also profoundly Franciscan in nature. Gordon notes that she was 'particularly devoted to Mary Magdalene', she was 'personally devoted to the host' and she was 'profoundly under [the] influence' of Fra Philip Alquier, a Franciscan who had

⁶⁶ See n. 57 above.

⁶⁷ For further sources regarding Queen Sancia, see Warr 1994: 326-334; Musto 1985: 179-214; Bruzelius 2004.

⁶⁸ Santa Maria Maddalena was founded by Sancia in 1324 for 'repentant prostitutes' (Gordon 2011: 377).

⁶⁹ Gordon writes that the foundation stone of Santa Chiara was laid in 1310, further work commenced in 1313, the roof was covered by lead in 1328 and by 1330, the first altar was dedicated by Pope John XXII (2011: 379, n. 25).

experienced stigmata (2011: 377-378). In more general terms then, Queen Sancia was a woman of great wealth who, because of her status, was unable to commit herself to the convent life. As an alternative, she donated her money to the charitable building of many Franciscan sites and she personally devoted herself to Mary Magdalene, to the body and blood of Christ, and to the teachings of a Franciscan who had experienced stigmata. The iconography of the Santa Croce refectory frescoes in Florence may suggest that the woman who commissioned them was at the very least, aware of Sancia's example, and at the most, influenced by it. Although there is no documentation to directly support this connection, a couple factors make this hypothesis plausible. First, the iconography itself supports an awareness of Sancia's spirituality on the part of the donor or at least on the part of her 'spiritual advisors', who provided 'guidance' on choosing the imagery. Second, the repeated figures of Mary Magdalene and of Francis imply a traceable devotion.⁷⁰ Third, the repeated appearance of Louis of Toulouse, Queen Sancia's brother-in-law, suggests a devotion to his example, but perhaps also recognition of the piety of the Angevins more generally. Fourth, the blood and body of Christ is emphasised through the figure of Christ at the centre of the *Tree of Life* fresco, as well as through the Eucharistic themes running through the surrounding food-centred scenes (Hatfield 1990: 142). Finally, even the portrait of Elizabeth of Hungary may point to a connection: although there is no documentation suggesting that Sancia had a personal devotion to Elizabeth, her mother-in-law Maria certainly did (Warr 1994: 326). Furthermore, Elizabeth was Sancia's great-aunt (*ibid.*). The chronology of Sancia's life also supports the hypothesis that her example influenced the Santa Croce refectory frescoes. Sancia lived from 1286-1345, by 1324 she had already founded Santa Maria Maddalena and by 1330, the first altar of Santa Chiara was dedicated by the Pope (Gordon 2011: 377-379). That the patron of the Santa Croce frescoes was aware of the Angevins is almost certain; whether she chose to feature Louis of Toulouse, or she was 'instructed' to have him included, she certainly would have been familiar with his life and his relevance to the Franciscans to whom she was clearly devoted. Further, if the patron was in fact Monna Vaggia, then her own death

⁷⁰ It is worth noting that if the sole focus of the frescoes was the act of eating, other food-related scenes from Christ's life which do not feature Mary Magdalene could have been chosen for the surrounding scenes (i.e., Christ's multiplication of loaves and fish, the wedding at Cana, etc.).

in 1345 demonstrates that she was a contemporary of Sancia's and given Sancia's prolific building in the early decades of the century, it is not out of the realm of possibility that, by her death, Monna Vaggia could have been influenced by Sancia's example. The vestiges of Queen Sancia's model of piety may not have been initiated by the patron herself, but may have been presented to her as an appropriate mode of spiritual expression. In either case, the frescoes of the Santa Croce refectory display not only motifs centred on food and meditation, nor do they simply convey important spiritual themes for the Franciscans. Instead, in my view these elements are woven together with the devotional desires of the woman who commissioned the mural. In her devotion to Francis, her demonstration of charity through food, and her emulation of a model of devotion similar to that of Queen Sancia of Naples, the patron portrayed in the frescoes elicited an expression of her spiritual agency by making visible her desires for salvation.

The Santa Croce refectory frescoes were undoubtedly commissioned, at least in part, to reflect the function of the space and to aid meditation. Nevertheless, the appearance of a female donor portrait in the central fresco necessitates a more complex reading of the frescoes' iconography and context. I have demonstrated that in addition to the ways in which the refectory's food-themed program contributed to the function and sanctity of the space, it also conveyed observable elements of the patron's personal devotions to Francis' affected, bodily piety and to Christ's Passion. Similar to the other two commissions outlined in this chapter, the Santa Croce frescoes portray, on the one hand, some of the damaging ways in which women's embodiment was discursively constructed. The widow's body is entirely covered except for her hands and face, relaying Florentine beliefs that widows should be modest, chaste, and avoid being seen in public. Further, the focus on food miracles and illness affirms associations of women's embodiment with the corruptible flesh and the material. On the other hand, however, the woman patron of the Santa Croce refectory frescoes was able to push back against those constructions by pursuing her personal desires for salvation. Even in 'taking her place' as a modest, chaste widow whose only 'appropriate' means for charitable action was through food donations and a funerary bequest, the patron was ultimately able to make her body more visible, to make it central, to be painted in the position of honour and to make her body proximate to the bodies of Francis and Christ. In this way, the patron's body

materialised in the frescoes as being approximate to and a model of the normative ideal of embodiment. Ultimately, the donor in question, like Queen Sancia of Naples, was able to rid herself of sinful excess wealth by pursuing her desires for salvation through the charitable commissioning of a mural which demonstrated her devotion to the Order and to the bodily sacrifice of Christ. Thus, the Santa Croce refectory frescoes depict not only central spiritual Franciscan themes, but also the successful ways a *trecento* Florentine woman navigated discursive norms of embodiment such that she was able to express her agency and stretch the boundaries of orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy bodies, even if she was only capable of doing so through her death.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to weave together the multiple strands of reality of *trecento* women's lived experiences that have been explored and developed throughout this thesis. Specifically, through the case studies presented above, I have attempted to highlight women's social and religious marginalisation; the ways in which women's embodiments materialised within religious discourses in close proximity to illness and death; the ways male embodiment simultaneously materialised as the idealised norm; the various ways women's charitable bequests were monitored or curtailed; and also, the nuanced ways *trecento* women were able, in spite of all of the aforementioned limitations, to participate in the creation of ritual art that ultimately pushed against the boundaries of orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy bodies. Women's marginalisation and subordination in *trecento* Florence is affirmed by the very nature of these case studies; because a majority of women were illiterate, they were prohibited from participation in civic life, and because they were denied the rights of property ownership, ritual art commissions are one of the few resources that positively point to women's participation and patronage. Having said that, however, Florentine women were restricted by civic statutes and laws more than other *trecento* Tuscan women and so even their acts of patronage were relatively rare. Even in the instances where women did successfully regain control of their dowries and attempted to utilise them for artistic commissions, it is important to recall that women were often forced to act through their male guardians, or with the 'assistance' of a church official who would advise

the widow on appropriate content and formatting for her bequest. As a result, it is no surprise that even in commissions like the *Altarpiece of the Blessed Humility*, where we see a powerful, 'independent' woman, women's embodiments are nonetheless depicted in ways that adhere to discursive gender norms.

Many of the scenes that feature Humility and her sisters affirm women's embodied proximity to illness and death, as well as sediment women's place as out of the public eye (or earshot, as the case may be). Simultaneously, the Humility altarpiece also affirms the normativity and centrality of male spiritual embodiment. Humility's model of piety is solidly based on imitating Christ whose human embodiment was inarguably male, regardless of how fluidly metaphorical categories of gender might have been utilised to describe Christ's spirituality. In the San Remigio *Pietà*, women's embodiments are similarly located. The two women donors appear in a traditional mourning scene within which they are depicted in close approximation to Christ's dead, mortified body. Moreover, the context of the San Remigio panel further highlights the ways women's bodies were marginalised and sequestered. As an altar screen on the North side of the church, the San Remigio panel would have most likely been the main focus of a congregation of women who were relegated to the 'dark' side of the building, out of sight of the main altar and of the male clergy. In the Santa Croce refectory frescoes, we also see the ways women's embodiments materialised as proximate to illness, death and mortified flesh, as well as the ways male embodiment materialised as the idealised norm. The woman patron who kneels behind Francis of Assisi is depicted in traditional dress for a widow insofar as only her hands and face are visible; this garb confirms Florentine demands for widows to be modest, chaste and as socially invisible as possible. The surrounding scenes of the fresco appropriately convey food-miracles, healing miracles and acts of charity; all pictorial elements that would have been deemed acceptable for a refectory, but also for a woman donor to commission because of discursive associations of women's embodiment with the material, with illness, with emotional affect, and with poverty. The compositional closeness between the portrait of the woman donor and Francis and the crucified Christ also affirms women's corporeal proximity to mortified flesh. However, despite Francis' and Christ's bodily mortification, their embodiments would have been understood as more perfect because of being male. Their centrality is affirmed even in the

composition of the frescoes (they are in the central panel), and it is their spiritual embodiment that the woman donor wishes to approximate, confirming their male bodies as ideal. Despite these visual confirmations of women's and men's embodiments within *trecento* religious discourses, the three women's commissions examined in this chapter cannot be solely defined as purely collusive with dominant soteriological discourses. Indeed, in their repetition, reproduction and reiteration of discursive norms, the three works examined above also exhibit differences in the ways in which women's bodies materialise.

In all three of the case studies examined in this chapter, women's bodies are portrayed in ways that push against the boundaries of discursive definitions of 'Woman' and therefore, push back at orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy bodies. The donor portraits in all three pieces place women to the viewer's left, or to the right of the central figure, which was perceived of as the position of honour and which was traditionally reserved for portraits of Florentine men. Furthermore, in all three pieces, the women donors are portrayed in visible, central positions: in the Humility altarpiece, the donor is pictured in the central panel with Humility herself; in the San Remigio panel, the two women are to the left but they are very visible and much larger than normal donor portraits; and in the Santa Croce frescoes, the donor is again in the central panel, directly below Christ and immediately behind Francis. In all of these instances, we see women's bodies materialise as central, visible and approximate to the primary figure of worship. The visibility of women's bodies is further heightened by the function of these pieces as ritual art. In the case of the Humility altar piece, the donor's portrayed embodiment literally would have been seen by every person who knelt at Humility's tomb for worship. In the case of the San Remigio panel, the two women patrons act as the guides for all of the women gathered on the north side of the altar screen; their gaze is what determined the direction of devotion and contemplation. Finally, in the Santa Croce frescoes, the woman patron's portrait takes a central role in a piece that would have been contemplated upon daily by Franciscan monks. Thus, these women's embodiments were not only central and visible (as opposed to marginal and invisible), but they also became objects of meditation and worship. Again, as a result of their proximity to Christ (or Christ-like figures), the placement of women's bodies in a position of worship would not have been considered heterodox; instead, women patrons'

approximation to Christ (even when by virtue of their proximity to Christ-like figures like Humility or Francis) within these ritual art works served to stretch the boundaries of soteriological definitions of 'Woman'. I argue that the ways these pieces push and stretch boundaries are not subversive—as some feminist scholars have attempted to claim—because of two important factors: first, their very existence points towards a level of adherence with orthodoxy and second, women's own desires were not necessarily for 'freedom' or 'disruption', but for salvation. Thus, even though these pieces cannot be characterised as entirely collusive with, nor entirely disruptive of dominant soteriological discourses, we may read these three case studies as acts of agency in that they enabled women to pursue their spiritual desires.

CONCLUSION

The dawn of the fifteenth century in Florence saw many changes: by the middle of the 1400s, Cosimo de Medici had risen to power and the Medici family provided the closest thing to royalty Florence had witnessed in over a century (Najemy 2008: 250-277). Not unrelated to the new prominence of the Medici were changing trends in art which developed an emphasis on 'naturalism' and 'realism'.¹ Fuelled at least in part by the 'rediscovery' of Graeco-Roman texts like those by Pliny the Elder,² Florentine painters sought to 'imitate nature' in ways which nevertheless allowed for cultural ideals of beauty, harmony and 'divine proportions' to shine through (Tinagli 1997: 1). Changes also materialised in the lives of women. Within the religious sphere of Florentine life, women flocked to convents in record numbers. As Strocchia notes, '[over] the course of the fifteenth century, Florentine convents were transformed from small, semiautonomous communities into large civic institutions serving family, state, and society' (2009: x).³ Well-known theological and philosophical texts of previous centuries also took on a new life in the hands of fifteenth-century author Christine de Pizan (d. 1430).⁴ Building on the works of Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and 'secular' authors like Boccaccio and Petrarch, Christine de Pizan penned numerous texts which, Allen has argued, '[reoriented] the history of the concept of woman' (2002: 537). The works of de Pizan in particular have proven tricky for some feminist scholars who, in spite of their wariness of teleological narratives of 'the self' (like that of Burckhardt, for instance),⁵ identify in de Pizan's writings a 'proto-feminist' ideology.⁶

¹ For further discussion of the impact of the Medici's on fifteenth-century Florentine art, see Kent 2000; Fremantle 1992; Feinberg 2011; Najemy 2008: 307-340.

² Paola Tinagli writes that according to Pliny the Elder, a painter called Zeuxis 'had painted some grapes which looked so "real", that the birds tried to peck at them' (1997: 1).

³ See also Trexler 1993: 6-30.

⁴ Christine de Pizan was born in Venice in 1363 but spent most of her life in Paris. Her father, a physician, is most likely the source for Christine's 'exceptional' literacy in medical texts, classical philosophy, astronomy, and 'Italian humanism'. After the death of her husband, de Pizan supported herself and her three children by working as an author and copyist of manuscripts (Allen 2002: 541). For a basic biography of de Pizan's life, as well as a more thorough examination of her works, see Allen 2002: 537-658. For an in-depth bibliographic guide to research on de Pizan, see Kennedy 1984; 1994; 2004.

⁵ For scholars like Burckhardt, the historical shifts outlined above marked the 'ascent of man' and narratives of teleological progress became intertwined with the beginnings of the

Danielle Régnier-Bohler, for instance, writes that ‘Christine de Pisan stands out as the towering figure in the history of French literature from 1395-1405....She was truly the first feminist in French letters’ (1992: 437-438). De Pizan’s writings on the ‘natural equality’ of women (as opposed to theological and philosophical definitions of women as malformed), and on women’s varied abilities and skills are complicated for Régnier-Bohler by de Pizan’s simultaneous assertions that in order to validate her own writing, and to make herself heard, she believed she must ‘become a man’. According to Régnier-Bohler, ‘[the] woman who would become a legitimate writer had to forge for herself a man’s heart’ (1992: 438-439). Unsurprisingly, de Pizan’s beliefs that a ‘manly’ spirit was required for accomplishment and renown do not satisfy Régnier-Bohler. She writes the following of de Pizan:

Of course in reading her we must always be careful to respect the polemical context in which she wrote, and we must keep in mind the many screens that stand between her outlook and our own. In the end, however, one question remains: Why did she subject herself to such a strange ‘transmutation’ of her sex, when she says that it was because she was a woman that she was able to conceive the admirable utopia in which she so fervently wished to believe?

(1992: 442)

Régnier-Bohler’s question belies a fundamental problem in some contemporary feminist analyses of historical women’s agency within hegemonic social discourses: if women were capable of overturning or disrupting gendered norms, then why didn’t they? Although Régnier-Bohler attempts a careful, contextual reading of de Pizan (‘we must...respect the polemical context in which she wrote’), she nevertheless expects that de Pizan—as a feminist subject with agency—would have concluded that woman *qua* woman was capable of great achievement. On the one hand, I would argue that Régnier-Bohler struggles with her conclusions about de Pizan because of the ways she interprets the social and religious discourses within which de Pizan was writing and on the other hand, Régnier-Bohler’s conception of ‘feminist’ seems to rely on a definition of women’s agency as disruptive of normative definitions of gendered bodies. I am not suggesting that de Pizan’s writings did not

‘Renaissance’ such that the ways in which the fifteenth century departed from the previous centuries acted as evidence of the birth of ‘the self’ (Porter 1997: 2-3).

⁶ One example of a scholar who saw Christine de Pizan as a ‘proto-feminist’ is Simone de Beauvoir whose description of de Pizan is, at times, nothing short of heroic; see de Beauvoir 2010: 118-120.

stretch the discursive boundaries of normative definitions of 'Woman'; indeed they did. Nevertheless, as Rosalind Brown-Grant has argued, this type of assessment of de Pizan's work seems to 'tell us more about what modern feminists might wish Christine to have achieved, as opposed to what she herself sought to achieve in her campaign to champion the cause of women' (1999: 2).⁷ Although my research has focused on the century leading up to de Pizan's success, I have chosen to discuss her example briefly here because of the ways the paradoxes of her life and works have proven problematic for some feminist scholars.⁸ In spite of the fact that in de Pizan's writings we have a traceable anti-misogynist sentiment,⁹ it is nevertheless the case that most attempts to characterise her work as 'feminist' prove anachronistic not simply because of the temporality of the term feminist itself, but also because of underlying assumptions about women's agency as being necessarily subversive or disruptive of discursive norms when parsed as feminist. I have argued throughout this thesis that dominant soteriological discourses of *trecento* Florence produced normative ideals of embodiment, figured as upper-class and male. These discourses also precipitated women's desires for their own bodies to approximate these ideals. Thus, even in the case of de Pizan—who was not raised in *trecento* Florence but who engaged thoroughly with the very same texts that informed Florentine discourses—

⁷ According Nicholas Watson, whose perspective I find valuable for my own feminist historical approach, the 'wishes' of modern feminists, or rather, their desires, should not be seen as irrelevant to historical study; in fact, he proposes 'that we explicitly set out to learn from the past how our desire for it can be used' (1999: 60). Examining the works of feminist historians in particular, Watson argues that 'we need to reevaluate the role of affect in thinking about the past, and devise historiographic models that are self-conscious about their incorporation of affect, rather than seeking to exclude it. It seems, too, that such models need to be especially sensitive to how moderns inherit modes of feeling, as well as institutional and intellectual structures, from the past, and how this fact may constitute much of the past's urgency for us' (*ibid.*, 72).

⁸ One scholar for whom Pizan's characterisation as 'proto-feminist' is especially troubling is Sheila Delany. Through taking 'a hard historical look at Christine de Pizan', Delany argues that Christine 'was not, even by the standards of her own day, a reformer or proto-feminist' (1990: 89). Behind Delany's scathing genealogy of Christine's works is, as she suggests, a challenge to 'the idea that the act of writing by itself suffices to qualify an early woman writer as a feminist, a radical, a revolutionary or a model for us' (*ibid.*). Pointing towards Christine's relationship with royalty, her involvement with upper-class patrons, and her elitism (among other things), Delany concludes that at best, Christine belongs amongst historical figures from whom feminists 'learn by struggling against them, by coming to terms with our ambivalence about them, by making the effort to understand historically their success and their failure' (*ibid.*, 103).

⁹ See Blamires (1992: 278-279) for a description of de Pizan's work as emphatically anti-misogynist.

we observe that although she attempted to stretch the boundaries of definitions of 'Woman', she nevertheless still understood men's embodiment as the ideal.¹⁰ One of the things I hope to have achieved with this research is to be able to recognise the kind of historical desire exhibited by de Pizan without stripping women like her of their agency or belittling the unique ways their contributions (be it in writing or art commissions) helped to expand dominant discourses of gender.

Therefore, this thesis has sought to explore the complex ways in which gendered bodies materialised within religious discourses. Specifically, through investigating a case study of fourteenth-century Florence, I have argued that dominant soteriological discourses—like those centred on doctrines of charity—produced normative ideals of embodiment, i.e. the male body of Christ. Further, these discourses elicited desires amongst Florentine men and women for their own bodies to approximate the normative ideal. However, the divergence between normative ideals of religious embodiment and actual bodies also produced material effects which were increasingly damaging for those gendered bodies farthest from the religious (and therefore normative) ideal. These material effects are, I argue, observable because of the ways discourses are performative, i.e. they produce what they name. Following Butler, I have demonstrated that through the iteration and reiteration of soteriological discourses in which all human bodies are corrupted by sin, but women's bodies are produced as particularly contaminated, the material circumstances for women in *trecento* Florence were increasingly damaging insofar as middle- and upper-class women were socially marginalised, civically and religiously subordinated, and whenever possible, sequestered from Florentine life. For women of lower-classes or working women, being sequestered in the family home was not a viable option and thus, it was their very corporeal identities as women (and by extension, as full human beings) which were called in to question because of the impossibility of their invisibility. Through theological texts like those by Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, women's embodiment was constructed and reconstructed as deformed, imperfect, irrational, in need of

¹⁰ As a result of de Pizan's location in Paris, I expect that the ways in which her own ideals and experiences of embodiment materialised would be quite different in some respects to women in Florence and it is not my intention to elide these differences. Nonetheless, given her use of characteristically Florentine texts from the *trecento*, as well as her use of theological texts that were also dominant within Florence, it is not unreasonable to suggest that some Florentine Christian ideals would have also been present in de Pizan's thinking.

guidance, as emphatically tied to the material and as hyper-emotional. The reiteration and dissemination of these discursive definitions of women's bodies as abnormal, dysfunctional and subordinate also served to produce (upper-class) men's embodiment as the normative ideal. Not only were male bodies defined as rational, active, generative, and as most perfectly in the image of God, but they also shared maleness with Christ who was the perfect embodiment of the normative ideal. The desire to approximate Christ was not just felt by men, however; all *trecento* Florentines were desirous of salvation and because of the popularity of the devotional model of *imitatio Christi*, it was precisely through approximating Christ's (male) embodiment that salvation became most accessible.

Even in discourses centred on doctrines of charity—which asserted that all human beings were infused with God's love and thus, capable of virtue—women's corporeality was defined as prohibitive of perfect virtuousness and further, the perceived effect of women's corporeality mandated male supervision in practices of charity. This doctrinal degradation was compounded by other types of texts concerned with women's embodiment of virtue; behavioural guides like the one by Francesco Barberino dictated right behaviour for women whose embodiment was defined as so unruly and troublesome that only through strict chastity, submissiveness, taciturnity, and if possible, seclusion within the home, could it be made respectable and virtuous. An integral part of right behaviour was, of course, the supervision and instruction of women by Florentine men. The supervision which middle- and upper-class men practiced over women did not prevent entirely some women from pursuing their desires for salvation, however. Although women were prevented from participating in civic life, most were denied access to higher education, they were prohibited from holding ecclesiastical office, and they were denied the rights to own property, some upper-class women were still able to participate in the production of ritual art. These commissions (often funerary bequests) provide unique examples of the ways in which Florentine women were able to negotiate their discursive positions, to pursue their desires for salvation, and ultimately to push back at normative definitions of women's bodies as damaged. I have argued, however, that women's art commissions—like the Humility altarpiece, the San Remigio panel, and the Santa Croce frescoes—cannot be accurately

interpreted as subversive of dominant discourses, nor can they be characterised as purely collusive with soteriological discourses.

Unlike some feminist historical scholarship which seeks to characterise women's commissions as subversive, and therefore demonstrative of women's agency, I suggest that women's agency may be interpreted instead in the ways Florentine women pursued their desires for their embodiment to approximate the normative ideal body of Christ, which they expressed through their commissions of ritual art. These pieces do not subvert dominant discourses because they maintain the need for salvation, they frequently align women's corporeality with illness and death, and they affirm men's spiritual embodiments as the idealised norm. However, they do not simply collude with discursive definitions because of the ways they make women's bodies visible, central, proximate to Christ, and therefore worthy of salvation. In this way, *trecento* Florentine women were able to push back at boundaries of orthodox definitions of salvation-worthy bodies and by extension, expand normative definitions of 'Woman'. This type of hypothesis, I conclude, contributes to feminist theories of women's embodied agency in several ways: first, through this particular analysis of the materialisation of women's embodiment within religious discourse, I have been able to maintain a focus on the real damaging effects that result from soteriological discourses. This focus has been of particular importance for me as a feminist scholar because although analyses like those produced by Bynum (1987; 2011) or Rosenthal (1988) have helped to complexify historical narratives of women's experiences (and thus have contested constructions of historical women as voiceless victims), they nevertheless have also tempered the real, damaging effects Christian discourses have had on women. As a feminist scholar, I am not interested in further victimising women, however if we are to take seriously the impressive, yet subtle ways in which women were able to express their agency, we must be intellectually honest about the conditions in which women's subjectivities materialised. Thus, second, by analysing religious discourses through speech act theory, and specifically through the lens of performativity, it has still been possible to locate the ways in which women's unique participation in religious life materialised in the gaps between reiterations of normative definitions of ideal bodies. Third, I have endeavoured to construct a definition of historical women's agency that does not rely upon an anachronistic binary structure of

subversion of, or collusion with dominant discourses. Instead, I have attempted to take seriously *trecento* Florentine women's desires for salvation, and therefore, I have argued that the ways in which they sought to construct their corporeal identities as proximate to Christ's through ritual art commissions may be read as acts of agency. As stated in my Pretext, and as echoed by Brown-Grant above, these conclusions may not be what I set out to find, nor what I *wish* Florentine women would have been able to accomplish. However, I believe strongly that in order to perform ethically as a feminist scholar, it is necessary to take a page out of Mahmood's book and re-examine one's own desires so as not to obscure the desires of the women we study. Ultimately then, I have endeavoured to conduct research that avoids damaging women further by burying their unique voices beneath my own feminist politics.

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